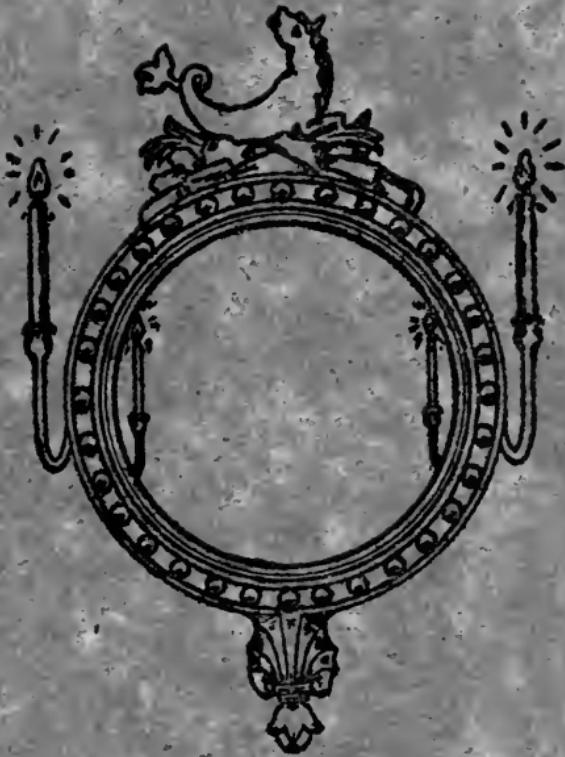
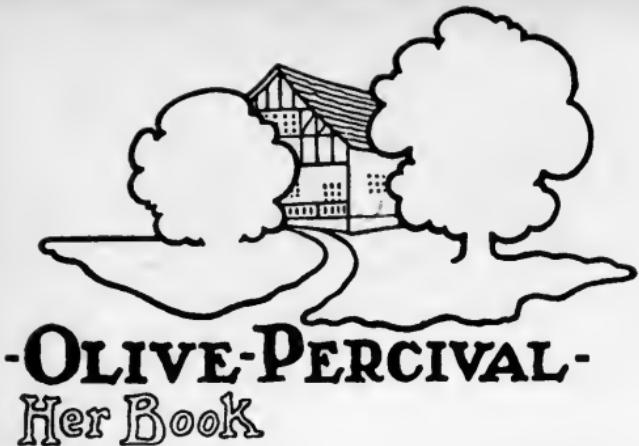


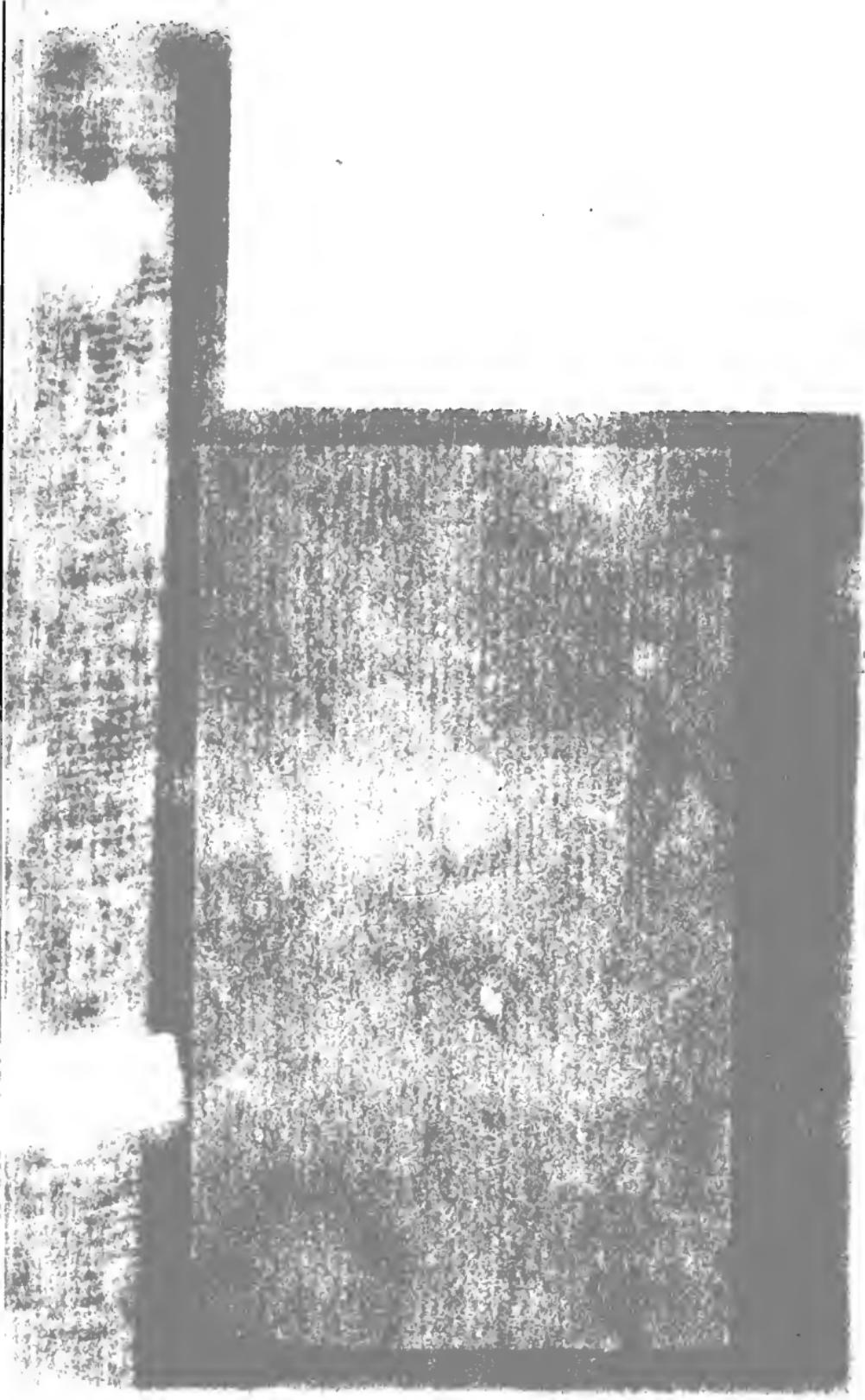
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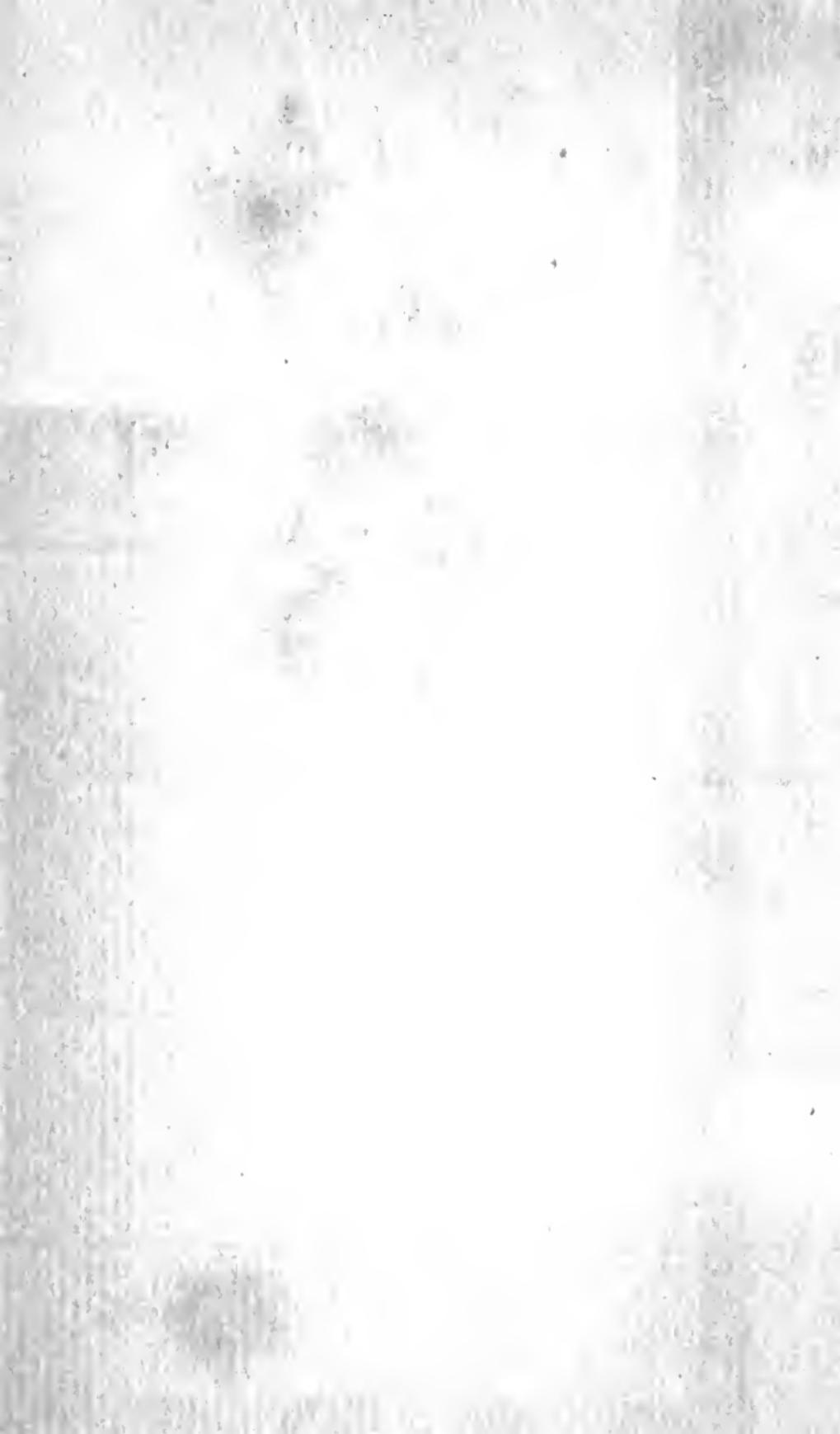


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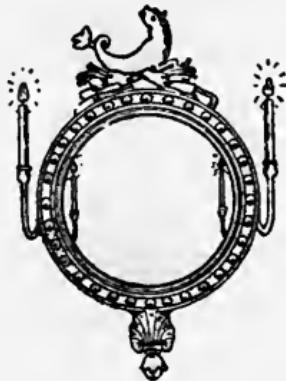
HOUSE OF DREAMS

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HOUSE OF DREAMS

BY

FRANCES FIRTH



Oxford

B. H. BLACKWELL, BROAD STREET

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To MY SISTERS

LITTLE ANN AND URSULA

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Dreams are for twilight and moonlight, and like the stars they fade with the coming of day. Daylight, in effect, tenders the account and demands payment from the spendthrift of emotion, demanding that the activities shall square with the dreams, and that all debts shall be paid, even to the uttermost farthing.

Unwillingly at dawn each man and woman awakens from dreams, shoulders the pack, and goes out into the light of common day to work and to labour, but when the night comes, the dreams await them on the threshold of the house.



HOUSE OF DREAMS

PRELUDE

THE home of the Inner Life is an ancient House of many chambers. It stands remote from other habitation, hill-placed, gazing on the green plain, with the silent deep river graving a winding way across the great expanse, seeking the line of light that is the distant sea. Overhead is the wind-swept sky : on angel wings soft and strong the great winds pass across the blue ; and high in upper air hang the pennant flights of birds.

The walls of that ancient House are crimson-dyed with eternities of sunset and sunrise, and the high grave windows look upon the curve of sheltering wood, look upon the trees that pilgrim-wise ascend the hill, look to the far-away snaky road,

HOUSE OF DREAMS

gaze upon the great plain and the glittering line of sea.

Stone steps, way-worn, lead to the yawning door, and to the echoing hall. An embracing sense of well being, of joyous peace, enfolds the spirit returning homeward. Here is the many-chambered House that encloses rooms so dear, so familiar. Vast saloons, rooms recessed and alcoved, rooms lit with candles set in hanging crystal and pictured in mirrors, bare white rooms full of sunshine, majestic galleries picture hung, vast tapestry-lined halls blue-green and wonderful, and the shadowy spaces, with high arched roof on angel heads, through whose dusk shines altar light and spiral incense-smoke aspires and twines.

Here in room and corridor, and on the creaking stairs, are sounds of voices, familiar intonations, light steps, crooning laughs, jovial cries, the beat of music, the echo of fire-warm words, the steps of the old. Here, too, are empty chambers in hushed silence, and here are sacred cham-

HOUSE OF DREAMS

bers that sometimes, but not ever, are peopled with beloved presences that life denies, and that death hides.

Close the outer door, O my spirit; veil the windows of this vast House, turn thine eyes inward to reality, and never wander more.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

I

THE child hides in the hay in the loft, or squats in an empty box in the lumber-room, or crouches behind a half-drawn curtain, or climbs a great yew-tree and finds there a retreat where the book's illusion is not dispelled, nor the vision of the imaginary life shattered. In life there is much of loneliness and little of retirement, and the difficulties in the way of attaining the latter set the invention and fancy to work.

The child is not content with visible hiding-places only, but seeks for them in the city of refuge of the inner Life.

Long, long ago before Peter Pan was born, I own, in a secret place in the Inner Life, a little box-like room covered with bark and moss, a kind of crow's-nest, fixed sky-high amongst the topmost elm-boughs. I climb the mighty tree when

HOUSE OF DREAMS

weary of the people in house and garden, I lie on the sweet prickly hay that fills my little house and listen to the heavenly chant of the wind and watch the drifting cloud-islands in the sky, and, in the word we coin, *image* for myself such a floating island home, because in a dream-life there is always a bluer dream beyond. Then I feel a sudden terror that, one fatal day, the people from whom I flee may notice the excrescence on the tree-top, and my hiding-place will be one no more. I will live in a hut disguised by dead branches. It shall be in a hawthorn grove crowning the high river-bank, near to the rabbit-holes. Through the half-open door I watch the idle aimless rabbits frisk, and see the white scuts twinkle and vanish down the holes, or, looking over the sluggish river, see the narrow field path that leads homeward. The path gives me a vague home-sickness, the hut is too far from house and garden and I do not long inhabit it. I dwell for a time in an underground room approached by a long tun-

HOUSE OF DREAMS

nel; it is a secluded spot but far too like a coal-cellar. At length I realise my heart's desire and own a lofty tower in a river island.

Strictly speaking, I never had any imagination, I only took what I had seen, and passing through the crucible of my fancy it emerged but little changed. I knew my island, it was an everyday island, and I often crossed to it, by no romantic drawbridge, but ignominiously by the boarded footway over the lock-gates. I knew equally the tower, and visited it picturesquely once a year with my family in the Conservancy barge, like King Charles and *his* family in the picture of their Happy Days. The donjon-keep was all that remained of the old castle; it symbolized romance in its entirety for me, and those Middle Ages which a youthful person evolved from Mrs. Markham's History of England, and Ivanhoe.

In my high tower of fancy I taste the purest bliss. I am the Lady of Shalott, and weave a magic web, and hear Sir

HOUSE OF DREAMS

Lancelot sing Tirra-lirra by the river. I am a high-born maiden watching for the return of my crusader ; weeping, alternated with praying, fills my hours, and I have a keen enjoyment of my anguish of spirit. I am also the Little Duke, and Elaine the Fair.

I still ascend my high tower in the Inner Life, no longer to personate others, but to be myself. I stand on the platform in mid air, under the inverted cup of sky, and see afar and near, in shade and shine, in the youth, the passion, the fading of the year, in dawn and twilight, all the sum of Life's pictures my mortal eyes have seen on God's good earth.

I see the velvet green of grass inset in trim gardens, the white bodies of nymphs framed in yew-tree hedge, the rainbow in the spouting fountain, heaven-blue flowers strewed in birch woods, the spilt water of lakes, the craggy path amongst the spring green oaks, the crescent moon floating through the boughs, the meadows in winding sheet of snow, the twisting river

HOUSE OF DREAMS

spanned by bridges, white villages like
lost sheep in the folds of hills, old red
houses set in trees, stone forests of spire
and pinnacle and tower, the high apoca-
lyptic vision of the white dome above the
city, and then the sunrise flush behind the
patient hills.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

II

If I were as rich as I could tell, as the rhyme says, I would realise a vision.

In my dream-palace should be a long gallery, lined with statuary on pedestals to accentuate the length of it, with a distant perspective through an archway of a white marble staircase of fifty-two steps, spaced by landings, in which the ascending and descending figures of people are reduced to the size of bright pencil-lines, moving in an atmosphere of remote clear greyness, exactly like the reflection given by a convex mirror.

On the upper landing, a recess filled with old tapestry of brilliantly tender hues representing an allegorical subject. You traverse another gallery with a mosaic floor, passing through a doorway, curtained with a pinkish-red material, into a

HOUSE OF DREAMS

vast lofty apartment. The walls shall be covered with faded pink-red Beauvais tapestry, bordered with flowers, centred with devices. On the wall facing the doorway by which you enter will hang the serenely beautiful *Noches de Cana* of Veronese ; of all pictures the one that satisfies the aspiration for splendid perfection of colour, and the balance of harmony of line.

I shall not care in what way the room is lit, but no windows shall intrude on its calm unbroken lines with stereotyped views of outside life, and crude daylight. I will be enclosed in splendour of colour, and my own delight in it.

In the composition of the forty feet of Veronese's wonderful canvas can be seen and felt the wave movement, as in the frieze of the Parthenon, and as in the opening of the Moonlight sonata.

In the upper section of the picture, on the balcony, under the cool blue of the clouded sky, waving hither and thither, is the agitation of the moving servants. In

HOUSE OF DREAMS

the seated figures at the left of the table in the middle distance, the wind-blown movement of the wave of heads. At the right of the table, the more tranquil tidal motion of inclined bodies, and the scarcely perceptible swaying of the wave in the centre of the composition where sit, calm and simple, Jesus and His Mother. In the foreground, the arrested movement and calm subsidence in the majestic group of painter-musicians.

My table shall be of the same shape as that in the picture, a broken square, covered with a handwoven cloth with point lace at the ends, and laden with Venetian glass taking a greenish shade on the white cloth, glass plates with narrow rims, high-stemmed fragile wine cups with broad shallow bowls supported on a ball and a graduated stem, fruit-dishes on a low broad foot, graved with radiating lines, and gondola-shaped vessels for sweet-meats.



No flowers are on the table, but the essential part of their charm will be there

HOUSE OF DREAMS

in the line of the glass and in the colour
of the fruit-laden dishes.

The table with the glass and the purple-dark grapes and cut pomegranates shall echo that of the pictured table above.

In my dream room, seated at table under the mellow colouring of the canvas, it shall not trouble us that we are unlike Veronese's magnificent men and women, rich in beauty and youth in their bravery of brocade, silk and jewels. We, old and shabby and battered, but still unscathed. Our inner true selves shall glow like unto them.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

III

My whole body ached with a weariness that could not be located; caused by the unceasing petty business of the morning. My whole soul was jaded and sick. I longed for a vivid sensation, a shaft of heavenly light to pierce the sad dim light of the room, a soul-satisfying chord of music; words that would give life and meaning to the unending, tedious, toil of everyday.

I prayed silently in my heart ‘Dear Saint Anthony, you who have helped me so often to find my lost keys, my purse, my everything, help me once more, for my soul and senses faint within me. Find what I have lost—the meaning of things.’

And help was close at hand. I lifted my eyes and saw, blooming before me on the table, a garden of the varying

HOUSE OF DREAMS

blues of the Delphiniums, the giant larkspur, rising from a pale green basin. Six spires were there, one with flowers of a perfect pure blue, with a faint white breathed on its petals ; a mauve blue, fantastic and capricious ; a chilly blue mauve, a gem like blue with a morose hood, a sad pale blue with grey-blue hood, and then the perfect blue spire again.

The flowers sprang lightly and strongly upward on their stems, an aspiration of blue, the spurs crocketing the stalk, and the unblown blue-green buds on delicate threads curved slightly inward.

From the crypt-like gloom of my spirit, from this dark foundation, arose an aerial Cathedral in my soul, not made by hands. Pinnacle and spire and tower lifted confiding hands to heaven, a jubilant blossoming of tracery and ornament on walls and porches, and in the soul of the Cathedral was an exaltation with deep peace at its core.

My mood, the aspiring flowers, memories of Chartres ! How slight the connec-

HOUSE OF DREAMS

tion, an attenuated thread of analogy, but it sufficed, my blue devils disappeared into space. Blue, indeed ! I will rather say my *papillons noirs* have flown away and now I see everything in a sunlit blue atmosphere.

Under moods of light, blue is the most changeable of hues, but Delphiniums, those souls of larkspurs, those archangels amongst flowers, sound a trumpet-note of colour beyond all earthly garden blues.

Blessed saint, once of Padua, invoked so often, not in vain have I installed your image in a place of responsibility on the old tea-caddy full of my many keys.



HOUSE OF DREAMS

IV

ONCE in a dream I stood in an unknown grey room, and though I myself was there, yet I did not inhabit my wonted familiar body : I was new-clothed in another that was to my heart's desire, I moved at ease, no longer masquerading in nature's misfit, for spirit and body were in unity.

A long-forgotten lightness of the heart was mine again, for all that I saw around me had the joyous, acute, reality of to-day, with no thought of shadowy yesterdays, and no foreboding of to-morrow. I saw with the freshness of vision of the beginning of things, for they were re-made for me, unstoried, unsung, unspoken, unused.

The grey room in which I stood had a spacious summer emptiness : on the warm grey of the walls were round mirrors with upward twisted branches hung with falling

HOUSE OF DREAMS

crystal ; the mounded lustres hung in fountain curves of strung crystals thick set with pendant drops.

On the dull-gold leaves of a great screen were pictured fountains set in old gardens, all different and all beautiful. A slim column of glassy water girt with a circle of grass ; a great stone basin hedged with velvety yew trees where spouting fountains clustered together like feathers bound in unequal lengths ; and baby fountains throwing silver threads on high.

Four narrow entrances, dividing the wall at regular intervals, gave on a flagged terrace with a balustrade and urns brimming with purple flowers ; below must have been a sunken garden, but of its tree tops nothing was to be seen, nothing but an empty sky pierced by the narrow spears of fountains and crystal shafts thrown high in mid air, leaping in rapturous exaltation !

And now in my dream there fluttered across the terrace, in a wind-blown line, three girls running with linked hands. The little slant of delicate cheeks and vaguely

HOUSE OF DREAMS

smiling lips was downward bent. The ballooning skirts of silk of changing hues, enfolded in transparent folds and flutings of grape-purple mantle and scarf, were like great bubbles of blue-green and green-blue iridescent water. The pale blue sky fell like a curtain, as if a scene were set, seasonless, dream-like, and in the air a fluting phrase of music.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

V

SALLY and Ingenua love to dance; last night they danced to their hearts' content.

Young Sally expresses the rapture and intoxication of the dance in every changing line and curve of her body, obedient to the music without and the music within. In the dance's swallow flights her impassioned dark eyes have an inward-seeing, rapt gaze, an absorption in the self-created arabesque of rhythmical movement.

Ingenua is of an elongated stiff slimness akin to a sculptured figure of an archaic virgin martyr, but she dances with the whole-hearted abandon of a nursery child. The childhood of the soul is in her eyes.

Sally invented a new style of hairdressing for the occasion, an inspiration which

HOUSE OF DREAMS

gave her a resemblance to a tragic heroine of Mr. Thomas Hardy. Over each ear was a boss-shaped collection of pinned up sausage curls; a narrow cerise band held down the parted hair low on the forehead. The colour of the ribbon was echoed in the geranium fastened at the waist of the white satin gown.

I foresee for Sally an individual way of expressing herself in dress, in the years to come. Even in childhood she used to plan a future in which she would wear a black velvet gown, flawless gems perfectly set, and a hat covered with phenomenally long ostrich-feathers resting on the shoulder. Strange that unwittingly she should have harked back in imagination to the style of dress of Balzac's *Femme de Trente Ans*, but perhaps not so very strange for Sally is by temperament a Romantic, and a dreamer of dreams, and she must dress the part.

Ingenua looks like a reproduction of an ingénue of the late seventies, and her slim body was dressed in character. The white

HOUSE OF DREAMS

muslin gown, with the fine black lines giving it character, was bound round the waist by a black satin ribbon, and a faintly-blue bow drew a fold of muslin across the bodice. From a long black ribbon hung, below the waist, the oval glass medallion rimmed in gold that had once been worn by one of our own people.

Hour after hour the young girls and their partners danced unweariedly, until at midnight the dance ceased to be.

I press like flowers in a *hortus siccus* the memories of many a ball and merry-making. There, undaughtered and alone, but accompanied by daughters of others, I have watched the brief triumph of girlhood. Now this goes to join the company of dry memories.

There are memories not yet dry, full of a bitter sweetness. How often in ball-room vigils I have seen the stars grow pale, and felt the chilly freshness of the breath that heralds the dawn, and seen without, in College gardens, the pendant coloured bubbles of lantern-lit trees, the lilac sha-

HOUSE OF DREAMS

dows, the patches of emerald grass, the pastel-pictured effects of seated figures; and within, in haze of dust, the thinning throng of dancers, and Pivoine amongst them, tireless and joyous——

But it is late, everything at last comes to an end. Let us pay the bill, send for the mouldy old carriage drawn by the aged steed, tip the yawning driver, and let us home to bed, wearily, wearily.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

VI

Elle croit à la beauté,
Elle croit à l'harmonie,
Elle se sent infinie
Les lèvres dans la clarté.

A CIRCULAR mahogany table with indented edges stands by my bed. Yesterday I put on it a little tinted plaster figure of a fifteenth century Virgin, copied from some carved woodwork at the Musée Cluny. The Virgin is closely enveloped in a pale brown veil, blue cloak and dusky red robe; only one hand is visible, drawing her veil forward; her head is deeply inclined, the attitude one of profound submission.

I placed three long leafy racemes of white Clarkia in a glass beside the little figure. I removed some of the lower leaves (rightly or wrongly) to give clearness, and to let the light filter through.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

The flowered branches, willow green, had a sad drooping look and reminded me of Ingenua's slender figure stooping over her embroidery.

Everything in the room was purely white; curtains, quilt, and covers; excepting two densely black strips of velvety carpet. I composed myself to sleep and to white dreams.

I dreamed I saw Ingenua bending spiritlessly over the embroidery frame on which was stretched the white altar-frontal, whereon she was working the frail cruciform flowers whose stamens and pistil show the Crown of Thorns and the Nails of the Passion. Her hand was pausing over the silver-rayed halo which filled in the background.

I had the knowledge in my dream that Ingenua's heart was heavy within her at the thought that her precious time of youth, the time for working for others, the time for rapturous happiness, was to be filched from her and woven into the embroidery, and that nothing in her life-

HOUSE OF DREAMS

story was to be as she had hoped and dreamed.

And I would have comforted her if it had been possible. I knew no words of consolation, but I prayed within myself, ' Virgin Mother who worked and wove in Thy earthly home, reveal to her the quiet content that lies at the heart of the task, so far beyond her own imaginings.'

And the Virgin spoke comfort to Ingenua's heart, ' Child, in the embroidery is wrought your effort, your desire for perfection, your individuality. It shall remain for a testimony when dreams have vanished.'

Then in my dream Ingenua was comforted, and her heart was light within her.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

VII

TO-DAY is the High Festival of the great white lilies; some are swaying gently in the garden, and some are cut and standing in dignified loneliness in tall glasses in the house. The lilies are on window-sills and tables, everywhere but on the dinner table.

I once saw cut lilies in a setting worthy of them. It was a silver wedding dinner party in a College Hall; the vasty space was glorified by the reflected afterglow of the sunset, and the light of the many candles burning in tall branching candle-sticks. On the long table was old plate, with the peculiar beauty of old silver, and the tall white lilies were sparsely grouped down its expanse, showing the loveliness of stems and blossoms. The white and gold of the flowers shone with a resplendent pureness.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

I remember towards the end of the dinner the old clock, which had seen many a jovial party, hiccoughed thoughtfully as it approached the time for striking another hour. The time of the merrymaking was waning. I looked at the guests' kind faces, at the rose-white garland of girls,—young creatures who had no connection or association with the Past, but who symbolised To-day and the Future.

The sepia brown twilight gathered aloft in the angles and recesses of the lofty ceiling like a dusky veil waiting to descend; and below was the warm steady glow of candle light, concentrated on the whiteness of the table, the lilies,—and the white light of friendly faces.

The twilight was there above, in the high vaulted ceiling, slowly descending to enshroud everything; but the light of youth and love was there below, and not to be extinguished.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

VIII

I HAVE often wished that the guests invited to a dinner party should be asked to wear the colour and design of gown that suited their type, and would also be one with the colour scheme of the room they would meet in, and the suggestion of the flower arrangement. To hint at such an idea would be to raise a storm of protest at the affectation and constraint this would imply, so it remains in the limbo of unrealised dreams. I know these refinings on sensation may be carried too far, as I found from a little experience of my own. A divine had sent a message that he was coming to tea with me. He was a rather superior person, a man of sensibility with regard to combinations of colour, wall-papers and old marble mantelpieces. I once saw the form of his visage change

HOUSE OF DREAMS

on hearing a silly woman's rejoicings at having attained electro-plated dish covers in succession to the Britannia-metal ones of her early married days. He, owning old Sheffield plate, delicately hinted at its distinction, although deplored the fact that a particular cover was too heavy for his parlourmaid to carry on a laden dish.

I had invited a friend to share with me the pleasure of this interesting man's conversation. Elizabeth, then treading unconsciously the first steps of the way leading to the vasty hall of death, arrived betimes. She was pink-cheeked from nervousness, and wore a gown of Reckitt's blue; the drawing-room's Donegal carpet was also blue, a sapphire blue; the colour in combination with Elizabeth's skirt was alarming, almost cataclysmic. It produced on me the same effect as Debussy's music when I heard it for the first time.

'Elizabeth, why did you put on that gown?' I said impulsively. 'What will Canon Greentree think when he sees these

HOUSE OF DREAMS

discordant blues? You might have remembered my carpet and worn black or a neutral tint!'

There were tears on her cheeks, and I was remorseful when I heard a sobbing desire to return home. I tried consolation, and to conceal the offending skirt under the tea-table, but I can never now show how sorry I am for hurting her by my hasty words, for she has worn for two long years in the Paradise of Angelico the blue garments that clothe a happy released spirit. . . .

It is the time of water-lilies, and I had a waking dream about them.

I saw in my imagination a broad room whose walls and doors were lacquer red; the colour of a red lacquer cabinet paled by time; the ceiling black and gold. The shades of the light concentrated on the round dinner table were from China. No pictures, only a long narrow strip of Chinese embroidery of contorted golden dragons on black, fastened on a wall. No fireplace, and the floor ebony-black and

HOUSE OF DREAMS

polished. The bare dark shining table had a smooth water-like effect, and seemed to bear on its surface a deep bronze basin shaped like the vasque of a fountain. Floating on the brimming water were full-blown water-lilies and buds, and small plate-like leaves with uplifted edges, and the long anchoring stalks.

Three girls, three men, were seated round the table. I can see the men ; they were young athletes. One tall and slim, with a stag-like carriage of the head and misty dark eyes ; the second was beautiful in form and face, with a broken nose, which, instead of disfiguring, added to his perfection. Rodin knows this charm ; look at his *l'homme au nez cassé*. The third man was blond, with the face and body of the Ludovisi Ares.

The three beautiful young girls were all red-haired in different shades of gold-red, red-gold and crimson-gold. The hair grew massively round the white crescent moon foreheads, with whorls and convolutions like curves round a foreign shell.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

Their white beauty was like the beauty of the water-lily, and in their dreaming eyes, dark with love's pain, a vision of the inaccessible.

I saw, too, the stiff folds of the black-striped white silk gown of one girl, and the velvety black rose behind her ear; the white satin and transparent overdress, and long pearl earrings worn by the second; and the densely-dark drapery enfolding the gold-red girl.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

IX

A FEW magnolia flowers opened on the pyramidal tree facing south beneath the window. The almond-white blossoms looked like water-lilies, lying cradled with widely extended petals on their glossy leaves and exposed brown undersides. I put the full-blown flowers in a white bowl to float on the water in dreaming beauty.

Imaginative passion, as the fervid lyrical temperament imaginatively conceives it, a fire hid in the core of milky opal, a white flame in a crystal shrine, so seemed the heart of the magnolia.

I knew whose heavy-lidded, chilly eyes would rest on them, a gaze as from some remote distance, and whose silent lips would part in a mysterious smile, on seeing outspread the vision of her soul.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

X

IN the dusky Book of the Cathedral gleams the jewel-light of high-placed illuminated pages, majestic and soul-stirring, to be read from one generation to another, whilst eyes can see what colour writes.

In the semi-twilight of the aisle burned steadily clusters of votive tapers, fixed on the herse near to the *Vierge noire*, clad in her festal robe of gold-embroidered white.

The concentrated light was resplendent, like the burning bush of old. A garden of the soul, although it bore but perishing flowers of flame of brief span, some with stems rigid and tall, some bent, others with a white halo encircling the burning heart, and some wasting away and aspiring the higher in death. The lights shone on the garlands of votive golden hearts, which wreathed the Virgin's shrine, in

HOUSE OF DREAMS

shining festoons, outlining the background.

Burning lights, votive hearts, both are more beautiful and touching here, than anything else could be ! Thoughts of the Wallfahrt nach Kevlaar brought a burning feeling in my eyelids.

Marie, dir bring ich ein Wachshertz,
Heil du meine Herzenswund.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XI

THE oriel window panes enclose in their circular curves of blue-green glass, cloudy white whorls, misty, smoky lines, glowing patches of sapphire-blue and of amber. The colours spread and undulate and drift cloudily in the circles, making vague dream - landscapes, hieroglyphics, magic spells and fairy tales, for the sun to read. One circle of glass holds the curve of falling water and a blue yew-tree, another in its hollow an amber trumpet with a thin blue blast, and yet another an empty circle of space with ribbon-like bands of milky colour floating round it. Is it a picture of an empty sea, or a child's dream of God in Heaven, or a soul in Nirvana? The panes tell their veiled stories and you understand what you can. They are different, but they agree in this, that the

HOUSE OF DREAMS

fairy-tales and romances they tell are all dream-stories for the soul, and change with the changing hours.

In the lowest pane is a script of closely intertwined lines unravelling their mystery, but the clue is broken, the secret never can be completely ours.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XII

I WISH for many things, but most I long for old cut-glass goblets and glasses, a Venetian-glass cup, and an oblong of engraved rock-crystal. I want to touch and to look indefinitely at them.

I love glass in many forms and I love water too, in ordered fountains, swift silent river, sleeping pond, secret well. Glass and water seem so much alike; I see the same line in falling water as in the outline graved by light of the transparent emptiness of a glass.

The word glass conjures up many images, and all entrance me. Candlesticks surrounded by jingling glass pendants, the convex of the mirror, the oval of looking glass, the crystal gazer's shadowy ball, the glass basin brimming with water, the Virgin's image in the Lourdes bottle, and the cross of rock-crystal circles caged in silver.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

Glass and water are akin, I cannot separate them properly in my mind. The old mirror with its depths of dark glass seems to be standing water, and the circle of mirroring water looking up from the deep well seems to be the mirror, and the vaulting ambition of the fountain is one with the efflorescence and interlacement of line of the Venetian cup.



There is a kindred delight in the tranced stillness of the pond with the floating withered leaves and motionless painted reflection of swan and yellowing chestnut trees, and the delight felt in gazing at the captured Undine of fragile glass. In the autumn, hangs on the garden walls almond-scented clematis in a tangled mass, the attenuated stalks bear on the twigged curves small myrtle-shaped flowers with chased petals. Sprays of it fill the twisted glass bottles and hang over the edges. I feel as if this little clematis had been created solely for my pleasure, and to be the genius of the glass.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XIII

Now that summer is over, and the iris is dead and gone, comes the time of remembrings. There was a grey room in an old house where it seemed to be always summer-time. Its windows, shaded with narrow folds of white silk, looked on quiet lawns sloping to the river. On the grey walls hung Louis Seize mirrors, and a grey Aubusson carpet covered the white floor. The Empire sphinx sofas and chairs, with striped pale yellow covers, seemed to be occupied by the graceful shades of Joséphine, Hortense, and Stéphanie. On the teakwood secrétaire between the two windows lay open the only book the room contained, and an old glass goblet holding a white rose. Over the marble mantelpiece hung a picture of an eighteenth century Venetian young noble-

HOUSE OF DREAMS

man in a red coat, painted by Longhi, and tall glasses were on each corner, filled with pale purple, yellow, and grey iris.

Grey, pale yellow, white, and the splash of faint purple of iris, and the spaces of the glassy reflection like dark standing water ; these were the colours of the summer-quiet room dreaming with a delicate regret of the past.



HOUSE OF DREAMS

XIV

ROUND my home, but a few years ago, was a tract of land, green and peaceful, empty of roads and houses. That is now a thing of the past. Once it was a space covered with allotments, peopled with crouching, digging figures, and scattered with apple and pear trees, the remnant of a large orchard dispossessed in its turn.

Now it is intersected with roads, and houses stand where once I saw the summer snow of the apple-blossom and the pear. The owl's nightly hooting has ceased, great elms have fallen, tall hedgerows, and ditches muffled in kex and long grass, have been swept away. Little remains of the ancient charm excepting snatches of a view seen from upper windows, with the interruption of roof and chimney, of slopes of tree-clothed hills.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

Ichabod ! the glory of loneliness has departed. Though there are still some ancient elms remaining, they are imprisoned in prim gardens, and shading smug villas with attendant sundial, greenhouse, cactus, water-butt and clothes-line. They are like the blind Samson at the mill, and I would some beneficent flash of lightning could strike and slay them, releasing them from the ignominy of their captivity.

I now take my walks abroad in the twilight and under the starry sky, for then I feel no more the sadness of the change ; all is altered in the dim shadowy light : the garden-enclosed birch trees become a grove for dryads, the group of elder trees a mysterious witch-haunted wood. The little gardens bordering the road, with path-traversed smooth turf, and tall stemmed flowers rising phantom-like from narrow border, seem gardens of enchantment, fit for the meeting of happy lovers ; and the shadowy paths, leading to the little white houses with the warm lamplight behind casements, seem to lead to places

HOUSE OF DREAMS

where are realised every simple heart's dream of love and happiness.

I walk in my favourite road; once a lane, the summer haunt of lovers, dark with the shade of tall trees, and sheltered by hedges. It still retains a part of the tall hedgerows, the gap with the dreaming meadow beyond, the great elms which close the lane. As of old rises up the damp scent of the invisible river, overhead is the great vault of heaven lit with splendour of stars, and beneath its immensities wander the heedless ghosts of generations of entwined lovers.

I, moving ghost-like amongst the shadows, attain the happiness of remembrance without regret. Only a thin vesture separates me from that great company.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XV

MALIGNANT autumn is creeping treacherously on us; stealing away our flowers, and bringing back a scanty aftermath of summer's roses, colouring capriciously the leaves of the little birch grove and the topmost leaves of the row of shivering poplars barring my horizon, and leaving unscathed the aspen's pale leaves.

The scent of burning weeds is in the air, a banner of white smoke floats across the trunks of the trees, there are fallen apples on the grass, and little birds are making a soft clattering noise like bird kisses. The sunshine pours into the house, painting a picture, in monochrome, of the window-frame on the polished floor. The beauty of the day is one of autumn's rare gifts, made to rejoice in with a conscious happiness, and to store away in memory. I am

HOUSE OF DREAMS

enjoying this delicate fading beauty, and the discordant sounds from without; from houses, from gardens, of wiry piano, screeching violin, and unmodulated voices; are made more endurable by its charm. The echo in my memory is very distinct, to-day, of the mellow music of my village, for autumn has deepened its tone. The clink of the blacksmith's hammer on the forge, the soft rumble of waggons in the lane, the clank of the pail-handle of the water carriers, the whetting of the scythe and the whisper of the leaves in the garden. The song of my childhood was set to this leisurely music, and through the desert-waste of change I hear its simple melody.

There are flowers to gather; the white and the green unfolded flowers of the tobacco plant for my white room, and the Chinese fringed pinks to look gay on the window-sills, but not many flowers remain that I care to bring into the house.

Brightness falls from the air.
Queens have died, young and fair.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

The sunshine will soon be paler and fainter, the smile of an old woman burdened with memories : I must seek to bring some colour indoors. The Donegal carpet must be unrolled and laid on the bare floor of the sitting-room ; its faded sapphire blue has none of the melancholy of blues, although it has some of the sadness of the colour. When October's pale sunshine rests on its misty blue, it seems to me the colour of resignation treading the way to peace.

On the white, triple-leaved screen hiding the door I must throw a cream coloured Chinese silk shawl, fringed with pale yellow and embroidered with red, purple, and blue flowers. The Chinese have an old saying that a picture is a painted poem, and so, too, on the shawl, is embroidered for the wise to read a verse of a song about summer's dead flowers, of the imperishable presentment of their beauty on the silk, and of the immortality of their scented petals embalmed in the *pot-pourri* jar.

I like the shawl; it is the facsimile of

HOUSE OF DREAMS

that on which Olympia lies in nude beauty.
When I look at its folds and coloured silks
Manet's picture rises before my eyes.

Sometimes to enjoy the colour I will put
on the high-backed sofa the carefully-pre-
served Paisley shawl. The vivid green of
the centre of the design and the dusky red
and green of the border are as fresh as
they were sixty years ago. The shawl has
been so tenderly guarded by the faithful
recipient that now it is mine I still feel it
is a sacred thing, and only wrap myself
occasionally in the camphor-scented folds
to feel the light warmth and see the
happy colour.

Soon must be lit a little fire, fed with
dead branches from the apple trees, and
when it burns and fills the air with a woody
scent it will recall summer afternoons
spent beneath their shade, and when the
red flames glow they will seem like lost
summer's flowers, rising anew on the
hearth.

XVI

A MELLOW gentle quality of sunshine penetrated the casements facing south as if a door were opened in heaven, trans-piercing flowers, revealing the colours of pictures. When I half shut my eyes and looked at the flowering stems of the white Michaelmas daisies on which the light dwelt, they appeared like a daisied field of tender grass. The tall blue and white jar was full of the long branches starred with miniature flowers, no larger than field daisies, with tiny leaves of the colour of May grass. The painted chair was in a corner of the room with the shield-shaped back to the wall ; the jar of flowers standing on the floor beside it was as high as the chair itself.

The fairy flowers brimmed over the dark rim, like the daisies in the background of a picture of Whistler's, and I wished that

HOUSE OF DREAMS

his flaxen-haired Victorian child, hat in hand, was standing beside them with the perfect unconsciousness of childish dignity.

The clear daylight fell on a large water-colour drawing, which occupied one side of a wall, in such a way that it brought out with transparent clearness the colours of the sylvan landscape it represented, the greens, and blue-green, yellow ochre, brown and russet of the forest trees, and the quality of blue of the hill-range on the horizon. This is the picture of which was written on March 22nd. 1903 :—

‘ I have bought a big watercolour, very swell indeed, by a man who signs R. G., “ Needwood Forest.” Who is R. G.? It is in full darkish colour and is really tremendously fine. It knocked me all of a heap when I saw it. I can’t get anyone of the ordinary to understand it, the damned fools : however, it’s lucky, for if they had I could not have bought it. I am sure it is worth £150 if it is worth a sou.’

HOUSE OF DREAMS

In the foreground of the forest a belt of trees surrounding a clearing and sloping banks, wooded, rolling country, a bare hill top emerging rock-like from an ocean of foliage, and a remote barrier of hills. A great windy sky crowded with white clouds full of shadow, a torn smoke-grey cloud pierced by light, and a gleam falling on a treeless hill. The picture is full of atmosphere and suggestion of large open spaces, of billowing tree tops, of great trunks deep in faded bracken, and distant delicate tree-stems. The subject is treated in a large Shakespearian way. It takes the jaded wayworn spirit into the open, far from weary enclosed spaces, and gives it the wings of the morning.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XVII

I WISH that I could create a room so constituted that it should have the power to make me feel the less the sadness of these calm misty October days, and the underlying regret for the dead summer.

I would like to own an octagon-shaped room, on a level with the tree-tops, approached by a gallery open on one side to the west, and lined with a row of clipped bay trees. It should be a China room, for three sides of the octagon would be occupied by shelves forming an open unglazed china closet. The narrow indented shelves should be piled up with the smooth surfaces of china. There would be old Worcester mugs and basins painted with sprigs and sprawling branches of flowers. Whole families of jugs—gay-waistcoated Toby jugs; jugs with verses painted on

HOUSE OF DREAMS

their sides and pink ships making sail; Admiral Keppel shaped as a blue-coated jug, but yet dignified and resolute of mien under his cocked hat. White pierced baskets, and blunt-featured Chelsea shepherds and shepherdesses posturing under sprouting hawthorn trees. Self-conscious stags and does reclining under bushes, and softly black amongst the tender colours a sleek-sided black Wedgwood teapot, with lid topped by the little figure of a girl enveloped in a shawl. Innumerable kinds of old English china, amusing and distracting to the eyes, and giving an irresistible desire to handle and caress their surface.

The remainder of the octagon room should be hung with mellowed ancient white silk, rusted and yellow at the seams and delicately slit, and the spaces between the narrow, high, windows filled with mirrors of many yesterdays, cloudy and spotted. On the teak-wood floor a snow leopard skin stretched before a golden-brown cane sofa in a black and gold frame. The windows holding in a narrow



HOUSE OF DREAMS

setting different aspects of a pale sky, broken by the lines of crooked apple boughs with thinning leaves and the clusters of fruit, and sometimes a foreshortened bird pecking at the bark and crannies of the old boughs.

Here, in this room, a hid sweetness of dried rose-leaves and the crackling whisper of fire on the hearth, here, I would be free of regret and live in the passing moment, thrusting the memory of the dead summer into the background, amongst the multitudinous shadows of faded years.

XVIII

CERTAIN moments will be remembered simply because of the brief pleasurable sensation passing like a gleam of sunlight over a brooding moor, or like the sudden, warm, light of candles in a darkening room. Nothing else remains in memory, all else has fallen into the oublie of forgetfulness, only the vivid moment when imagination was stimulated.

This October morning the sky was of a pale blue, covered towards the west with white clouds drifting before a fresh wind. The great aspen-tree near to the windows had lost nearly all the leaves on the lower branches, only a few leaves quivering at the tips. The upper part of the tree was still leafy, and full of rumour and unexpected silences. It drowsed and dreamed and awakened and vibrated like the spirit of man to every call from without. The

HOUSE OF DREAMS

apple-trees were tranced, the leaves scarcely moving, but at the horizon the tall poplars were bowing in the wind and the leafy edges shivering like surfaces of water.

The early morning was chilly, but warmed by intermittent bursts of sunshine, and under the apple-tree was an expanse of sun-warmed grass, with the saucer's oval brimming with wind-shaken water, reflecting the light in patches. The white dog lay hard by outstretched in perfect comfort. The black cat, high-shouldered, impassive and majestic as Pasht, sat on the warm earth of the flower ravished borders, and contemplated with disillusioned eyes.

I gazed anew with satisfaction at the glossy patches on the dog's white coat, black continents mapped on the sleek sides, and at the cat's sombre fur freaked with white, and the capricious spotting of black and white, pig-like in effect, of the pink-lined ears. The variation of tone, and the balance of colouring in the dog's

HOUSE OF DREAMS

white and black, and the cat's black and white, flattered and caressed the eyes.

A feeling of gratitude for the household's animals' beauty and grave content heartened me, as if the warmth of the October sunshine had power to penetrate within.

Perhaps I had experienced an unforgettable sensation.

Later I sat at the piano in the West Room where hangs over the mantelpiece the picture supposed to be Nancy Dawson dancing the Scarf Dance. I was playing the Rant, a tripping, lilting tune of the seventeenth century, to which later used to be sung, 'How happy could I be with either.' Nancy must often have heard it, for she was dancing in the Beggar's Opera in 1760. I played it several times, enjoying the dancing measure, and trying to make the notes tinkle like the harpsichord on which it used to be performed. How old was the air, and how young the spirit of it !

A stone's throw from me, on the old

HOUSE OF DREAMS

green sofa, sat Miss Pinker, a human sewing machine, needling at Ingenua's new blouse, but in reality removed by more than a century of time from my thoughts.

'What a nice tune! It calms the nerves,' she said suddenly; and lapsed again into silence.

So she, too, had her good moment; the shadow of beauty had been thrown on the bare white walls of the House of Life.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XIX

THE box edging has been planted round the new flower bed, which aims at being formal in design. The box accentuates the lines of the hollow square formed by the narrow borders, just wide enough to contain recurring clumps of white June lilies and pheasant's-eye narcissus to bloom in May. In the centre of the square of grass is a clipped, round, box bush with the horns of two crescent-shaped beds curving round it, bordered with box edging. The crescents to be filled later with July's Nankin lilies.

The design will be amusing to look at, even in late autumn and winter when it lies gazing at the sky, empty of flowers, as it does now, a mere ribbon of brown earth bordered with living green. It lies alone on a limited space of unoccupied

HOUSE OF DREAMS

grass on one side of the front of the house; a brick path separates it from a miniature birch grove growing in a carpet of ivy. It matters very little what very few feet of ground are covered by the formal garden, save the mark, on the right, and by the company of birch trees on the left; there is room there for content.

The birch trees have their charm in all seasons and aspects of light, slim, flexible white creatures with strands of unbound hair blowing in the wind, quivering in freshest spring green, gemmed with rows of crystal beads, tossed and rocked by autumn winds and pelting the turf with little yellow leaves; or motionless, stark, and ghostly on October nights, clad in shivering tatters.

The lines of the little garden framed by the box edge content me, though I can traverse the small ordered space in a few paces through the opening in the square of border.

I like it the better in its apeing ambition,

HOUSE OF DREAMS

because it reminds me somewhat of the ground plans of palace and lordly mansion I used to execute on the lawn on a summer's afternoon with an outline of newly-cut grass, forming enclosed spaces communicating by many entrances and corridors. To-day I, poor elderly child, tread with the feet of imagination my little maze, and feel something of the child's sensation of joy in creation.

I am rich also in the possession of two mounds of heaped-up earth, grass clad and precipitous, rising to the giddy height of five feet. They are near to the wall in another part of the garden; I wish they could be transported to the neighbourhood of the formal flower bed, for they are constructed on the same scale. Both mounds are surmounted by little box trees; one has its bushes isolated and shaped like obelisks, and the bushes of the other mound are merged into a compact hedge-row, in the which I do not despair of finding, some spring day, a bird's nest. The shapes of the mounds are different; one

HOUSE OF DREAMS

is higher and narrower and has a smaller flattened summit on which perch the little clipped obelisks—it is named Parnassus; the other, having a rounded form, is named Mount Tabor, because it resembles somewhat the outlines of the Mount of the Transfiguration in Raphael's picture.

An engraving of this picture used to hang in a maple-wood frame in my father's house, and young eyes, weary of lessons and tasks, used often to be raised to follow every line of the agitated figure of the lunaticke, the gesticulating mother, the certain man, full of faith, the disturbed disciples, and the remoter spiritualised figures on the summit of the Mount.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XX

Two armchairs are new clothed in fresh petticoats.

This is conventionally the wrong time to refresh or renew, but so many rainy, chilly, sunless, snowy November days separate us from April. Courage to endure the time of waiting is wanting, and spring is needed indoors.

One of these armchairs stands in the West Room by the clear burning fire, framed in blue and white tiles, figured with ships, and I sit in an uneasy chair in a draughty corner to feast my eyes on the new white cover, thick set with lady-smocks all silver-white, tinged with lilac, and on the fluted lines of the flounce at its foot.

The old mahogany chest of drawers, many-handled, stands close to the arm-chair; on it is a great Nankin dish. From

HOUSE OF DREAMS

my point of view, where I sit, I see the indented line of the blue and white dish, in perspective, cutting clear across the faint warm lilac of the flowered chair-cover; the severe outline and cold blue of the large expanse defined against the bad line of the mid-Victorian chair

Beside the large dish is a deep glass bowl, brimming with water, on which voyage three stalkless camelias and a detached petal. They float like crinolined Ophelias, their *clothes spread wide*.

At a neighbouring table sits Sally struggling with the difficulties of a French composition. With the aid of Littré's dictionary she is endeavouring to write some remarks on Émile Verhaeren's poems, and occasionally she reads aloud a verse of *Novembre*. Sometimes she declares that it is impossible for her to write critical remarks in French, then in another mood she complacently reads a completed sentence of her own composition with a staccato emphasis peculiarly her own.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

The little room seems a sentient thing, warm and hush'd. A faint gleam of sunshine enters, rests for a moment on the curved lines of the crystal bottle, restores the delicate smoke-colour of the clematis flowers that fill it, and then passes shadow-like away.

'Sally, look at the miracle of light !'

Sally glances at the bottle, glances at the glass bowl of water with the artificial arrangement of the floating opaque white flowers, then, returning to her original occupation, and prefacing it with the remark that it was *rather* nice, she reads another verse :—

Mais au dehors, voici toujours le ciel, couleur de fer,

Voici les vents, les saints, les morts

Et la procession profonde

Des arbres fous et des branchages tords

Qui voyagent de l'un à l'autre bout du monde.

Voici les grand' routes comme des croix

A l'infini parmi les plaines,

Les grand' routes et puis leur croix lointaines

A l'infini, sur les vallons et dans les bois !

I look and see without, framed in the window in the interlacement of branches

HOUSE OF DREAMS

and twigs covering the sky, in the wintry web woven by the apple tree, the impressionist poet's visualisation—‘ des branchages tords qui voyagent de l'un à l'autre bout du monde.’

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XXI

THE anniversaries I keep are not materialised by a date, and need no sign of remembrance ; they are incorporated in life itself.

For myself, by taking due thought, I have become uncertain of my own age, and when by a further effort I have succeeded in forgetting the date of month and year of my birth I shall be free of the artificial, arbitrary, and false measurement of life, and see it in its proper proportion in the duration of sensation, emotion, and idea. The experience that was but a span long and changed life, the emotion that in the twinkling of an eye coloured existence, the sensation of form, of colour, or of sound, that built up in the spirit, in a span of time, a place of refuge ; the duration of the real life lies in these.

Illogically enough, I like to have my birthday remembered, and I was pleased

HOUSE OF DREAMS

when a birthday present was suggested to me, a colour-print of one of the Infantas of Velasquez.

I saw the print a little while ago hanging in a shop window, and I carried away an impression of gorgeous vermilion at head, throat and wrist ; of wide-spreading rigid grey skirt striped and broken by spaces of dull pink, and of a blond-haired childish Infanta bearing royally the burden of a grotesque head-dress. The harmony of the colouring, the exquisite dignity of the royal child, gave me a feeling of delight.

I was, however, doubtful if I could accept the print and hang it in my bedroom. The process was so different from the two etchings already hanging there, and the scale of the pictures differed also. It was a serious matter to introduce a new picture ; it might be an irritation to the eyes, it might be oppressive to the imagination. I have decided not to have it.

I was grateful, but I needed none of that cheerful colour, which the would-be donor

HOUSE OF DREAMS

says my bedroom lacks, and that the print would introduce. I felt no necessity for it in the repose of my white room, for have I not the lilac colouring in the flowery chintz cover of my armchair? Have I not the dull clover-pink of velvety rugs, and do not both colours blend in a charming harmony?

There is a pinky-red camelia also, floating in a goblet on a willow-patterned dish.

The colour is insinuated in the room rather than imposed, and I am content with it and will make no change.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XXII

I LOVE my bedroom, for various reasons, but principally because it is the only room which seems really to be my own. I can push the furniture into any position I choose without fear of criticism, I can put my little valued belongings and flowers on my table without fear of seeing them upset or pushed out of the place where they show to the best advantage. Where I ordain my two chairs to stand, there they remain, as Americans say—put. Here I can be alone in the morning, and, sitting at my table placed close to the casements looking east, I can see the undulating line of distant hills and the scattered sentry-trees on the skyline, where lies, I know, the upland road; the gleam of sunlight on the different shades of brown, russet and green of the trees

HOUSE OF DREAMS

in the foreground, and the remoter ones clothing the slopes, velvety soft with blueish haze. I can see the pale blue sky, with broken masses of white iceberg clouds floating across it, and the scanty bright-yellow leaves of the aspen clearly cut out against the blue.

When the sun is overcast I can close the casement and turn my eyes within on the room. It is hung with a white paper covered with small grey lines, white dimity curtains shade the windows facing the east, and the small window facing the south. All the lower panes of the casements are filled with translucent saucer-glass, each pane differently and capriciously stained on the milky ground with amber, blue, and yellow-green. When the casements are closed the outer world is blurred through the glass, the neighbouring houses become a patch of red on a palette, people look like trees, walking. Sometimes on menacing autumn days stormy amber light enters from without, a reflection from the yellow-leaved tree



HOUSE OF DREAMS

close to the window, a colour resembling that of the foliage Gainsborough employed in the backgrounds of his portraits.

The parquet floor has two clover-coloured rugs on it, filched from the Prophet's Chamber, and the bed's summer covering of embroidered white linen is replaced by a white quilt scattered with willow-green spots and mauve roses. These are my only winter changes.

Over the mantelpiece hangs a lithograph of the first impression of Whistler's *Battersea*, and in the two tall twisted glass bottles on each side of it is the grey smoke of the Old Man's Beard. The Virgin's little figure from the Musée Cluny stands alone on the narrow ledge below. I sometimes put an old red lacquer saucer beside the bottles on the mantelpiece, but it always looks crowded, strange as it seems, and I take it away and put it again in its place on the dwarf bureau.

The lacquer saucer is of a deep red, and pictured in gold in its hollow curve are

HOUSE OF DREAMS

bridges spanning a lake surrounded by hills, bordered by flowering trees, pierced with roofs of houses, boats skimming over the water's surface, and two cranes peopling an empty sky. It stands on the white cloth embroidered with grapes and tendrils, beside the old mahogany tea-caddy with the figure of Saint Anthony on the lid, and the mother-of-pearl snuff-box with Europa and the Bull faintly scratched on the oval of the cover. Every object incongruous but harmonious as a whole.

I love my quiet room, peopled with silent presences of dreams. Here I lay me down to sleep; here I hope to sleep one day the dreamless sleep.

XXIII

IT was Hallowtide, and *the night last night was strange and shaken*, the rain sobbed without, the wind screamed and wailed, and beat at window and door as if to force an entrance. It beat, too, on my heart, for borne on the blast were the voices of those left too soon from experience and labour, love and illusion. The voices bewailed themselves with hopeless lamentations, revealing the numbed suffering of the bankrupt of hope, the angered surprise of the scourged by fate, the piteous tears of the tender, all the bitterness hidden from the indifference of man. The voices without were sobbing, crying, rebelling; children crying for the embracing arms and warm laps of mothers, the young weeping for the fruition of dreams, man and woman grieving, lamenting for Life's unfinished task.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

My flesh crept, my heart was numb, and I felt as one who stands by an empty grave, plumbing its depths, and hearing the heavy steps of those who come bearing dead Hope for burial.

All through the dark hours of the dreary night the lamentation of the beloved earth-bound spirits ceased not, but with the dawn a great silence fell, and peace was theirs once more.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XXIV

THERE remains no flower to blossom in my garden border, excepting the white and crimson snapdragons.

It is pitiable that these flowers should be for me the insignificant Finis of the year's flowers, all the little garden's high hopes and realisations ending in this poor *Hic jacet*—for but one week ago, I plucked a milk-white rose, with unfolded petals full of tender shadows, that is now beautifully consuming away into a transparent etherealism.

I have no flowers in my borders, for I dislike chrysanthemums; they seem abnormal to me, the double blossoms on a par with the long-haired monstrosity of a lapdog, and the single blossoms perilously like China asters. Their charm lies only in the perfume of freshly turned garden mould of the warm petals.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

How often in past November days have I braved the cruel Lincolnshire cold, the biting wind blowing over the Fens from the North Sea, to run down the garden path to the bed sheltered by the high privet hedge where grew chrysanthemums, in order to shake off the first snow of the year that was freezing the heart of the warm-scented flowers. They seemed to my mind like Japanese ladies in an untimely snow shower, clad in smooth surfaces of silken splendour bound with wide sashes.

All day long a cruel wind has blown from the north-east, entering the house irresistibly through window-frame, crevice and cranny, withering in me through physical suffering every better impulse, every feeling of common humanity or courtesy; shrivelling all desire to act, enjoy, or create. The morning and the afternoon were a veritable Purgatory of suffering, and the mind became as numbed as the body. In my frozen thoughts but one idea torpidly persisted. Had the sun at

HOUSE OF DREAMS

any remote period ever flooded the house with waves of light and warmth? Had not this icy wind blown from the creation of things? There was no remembrance or power to reconstruct the sun-filled past in which my body had rejoiced in warmth, my inner life bourgeoned, and high hope was still mine. Now deep in a relentless grave lay imprisoned stricken hope, dead dreams; and beside the heaped-up mound of bare clay I lay in a silent passion of grief.

Dreadful morning passed into withered afternoon, and afternoon at last died into weary evening. Then came the merciful black oblivion of night.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XXV

THE sky has been overcast and the rain has fallen.

In the morning, the sound of falling rain soothes me; I like the hedged-in, enclosed sense of seclusion, the improbability of any incursion of drab-coloured people from a grey world. The rain is an effectual barrier.

There is a little purring wood fire on the hearth in the West Room, and a soft patter of rain against the window panes. I draw the chairs into the right angles for comfort; the old green sofa faces the leaping flames, backed with a three-leaved screen. I invite the capricious black and white cat to slumber on the hairy rug between the legs of the glass screen, a place of safety from man's clumsy foot. I choose a place from which I can see through the plain glass which covers a

HOUSE OF DREAMS

section of the oriel window, the sky, intersected with slender birch boughs, and budded twigs finished with brown fingered tassels, and beyond, in a grove of bushes, the evergreen blue of the massed needles of a fir-tree. I go to the window sometimes, and if I am fortunate, I see the gem-like blue of tits amongst the boughs of two apple trees with intermingled branches.

My neighbour's patch of grass of different shades is mine to see, and the mountainous outline of evergreen oak.

In the long, rainy afternoon my mood generally changes; I become restless and full of impotent longings for a home with many *warm phantasmagoric chambers with painted windows and storied walls*, as Robert Louis Stevenson writes. His were the chambers of the brain—mine would be material chambers; I feel I could have differently coloured thoughts than those of misty grey, blue-shot, that fill the rainy morning, and that are full of passive happiness, if I were in other than this small room. It is the new note

HOUSE OF DREAMS

sounded by the rain of the afternoon that disturbs me; a note of finality, a note of doom.

I feel my ears could be stopped to its menace, and my spirit escape and flee far away to unseen worlds and lost hours, if I had but a certain kind of room in which I could wander up and down until the restless sad mood departed.

I can see the room. Long and wide, and high-roofed, unceiled, like an immense barn, but, unlike a barn, panelled with dark wood. The windows are but slits, high-placed. The great door that opens in the centre is ajar, and theplash of rain without, on stone and earth, conjures up the unseen,—the fountain's basin dimpled with rain, the drenched graves of the flowers.

I see the great fire of blazing logs burning on the open hearth, and on each side the hooded wooden settles, sheltered from wind and draught, filled with dark blue cushions; and the brick floor, spread with the skins of deer and sheep.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

I feel this room is sacred to me and my thoughts; my very own. I wander up and down in perfect freedom, throw myself before the fire, and then, in a waking dream, the shades of dear, dead dogs enter, approach the fire, turn round several times, and nestle beside me. Through the half-open door peer wistful-faced cats, and the nursery puss, tabby and slim, jumps on my knees. There are Minnie, Tabby, Dinah and Saccharissa, the companions of a lifetime, unforgotten friends, come back to me out of the rain, out of the Shades.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XXVI

OVER the mantelpiece in the West Room hangs a picture which is the property of Pivoine. It belongs also to all of us, for we can see it every day, and its image has been graved in our memory.

It is an oil painting of a full-length figure with one foot advanced in a dancing attitude, supposed to represent the beautiful and infamous Nancy Dawson, the famous dancer of the middle of the eighteenth century. She is represented standing against a dark background holding with extended arms a transparent scarf across her skirt. It is a figure which owes nothing to costume : a clumsy wide-hipped skirt of a wall-flower pink colour, the same tint crossing and trimming the basqued wall-flower-colour bodice, rigid and wooden in effect from the severe corset of the period.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

Her eyes, with the high-placed well-defined eyebrows and sensuous heavy lids, are alluring and with a latent hardness in them, the nose well shaped and clearly cut, the mouth large and forcible, the chin heavy and flat.

Clearly a courtesan of character.

A thin strand of leafless immortelles lay on the frame of the picture of Nancy Dawson. A loose cluster of the chrysanthemum-like flowers with the long stalks projected from beyond the black picture-frame and gold mount. This was the point from which the garland sprang; then came rustling flower-heads pressed together, bound and cross gartered with the straw-coloured bast, and a few escaping from their bonds, hanging loosely over the dark background of the picture.

The immortelles did not look funereal in any way; they had the colouring of an autumn-stained forest, and seemed in a true sense to be everlasting flowers of bronzed gold. The neutral colouring of the walls of the room, and the pictured

HOUSE OF DREAMS

skirt and bodice, of a tint something like that of a pinkish wall-flower, toned with the strand of flowers whose colours ranged from buff, dove-white, lemon-yellow, brown and apricot; to red-orange, bronze and pure warm crimson.

A flower-head had fallen, broken from the stalk. I picked it up from where it lay; it was crisp and pleasant to the touch. I inhaled its faint scent, which was like freshly-planed deal; it had the smell and taste, too, of the green wooden trees with crinkled leaves which used to come out of wooden boxes in company with a shepherd, a house, a pen, and a flock of wooden sheep. I smelt again in memory the odour of deal and painted toys which a certain paper-covered play cupboard gave forth when it was opened. A vision rose before me for which the sense of smell was responsible, a vision full of trivial details of the scenery and properties of the nursery of far-away childhood, the stage on which we strutted our little hour.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

There was no perspective in the unsought for, mute remembrance; little things were as important as the greater. The peculiar look of the concrete floor, uncovered near to the nursery doors; the brown matting in the middle of the room, with occasional pins embedded in its meshes, agreeable to disentangle; the magic wooden cupboard which became a bed at night, the rocking-chair which made a squawking noise when ridden as a horse, the fire-warmed high fender pierced with holes, so pleasant for a young body to press against on a winter night; the feeling of the limp old flowered window curtains which had been our grandmother's, the pictures nailed on the walls, 'Ada' with her blond curls and blue sash, and the less beautiful 'Daisy' with short dark hair that I used to pretend was really me. In the collection of pictures that hung over the mantelpiece, the sacred and profane subjects jostled each other in a friendly way; H.M.S. Collingwood with all canvas spread, the Descent from the

HOUSE OF DREAMS

Cross, Queen Victoria in all her bravery of gems and a modest black silk gown, a Virgin, well endowed with hair, and Christ and the Children.

The vision from a place unknown to geographers, where are hidden perdurable things, occupied but a second of time, like a dream before the morning watch ; and then I raised my eyes once more to Nancy Dawson wreathed in immortelles.

XXVII

As little as my bed.

I do not habitually have flowers in my bedroom unless I feel the desire to dream dreams. I found the most fantastic visions resulted if white phlox was by my bedside ; it was not the time of their blossoming, July was too far away ; I had to content myself with the violas, purple, yellow, and white. They stood in their cup on the mahogany table near to my bed-head. How blurred and deeply sunk was the reflection the table gave of cup and flowers, like the memory of events of remote childhood !

The white violas were crowded together on the cup's rim, and the others pressed together on tiptoe to look over their heads. They looked like daisy-faced children at a circus.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

To-morrow they will have drawn their petals inward with a shivering movement, enfolding themselves in their own shrouds. They are but flowers of a day.

At night, when the house was sleeping, I opened my bedroom casement that looks to the east to hear the tall aspen tree without, rustle dryly *sotto voce*, or unweariedly imitate a summer shower. The violas were as close as possible to my bed, and I slept, and dreamed a dream that broke off suddenly, like a passage read from a childish book or a bar of simple melody that sounded and ceased.

Again I was back in the long ago, in which I was a small round-cheeked girl away from home for a night's visit.

I dreamed that I was lying on a great feather mattress that billowed up round my small indentation; a bed that seemed large as was that of the Big Bear.

In my dream was enclosed the child's dream—that she was safe at home again, in her own bed, and that between sleep and awaking she heard the comfortable

HOUSE OF DREAMS

and familiar creak of the day-nursery door cautiously opened by Dido's hand.

And the small child (that once was Me) awoke from the young dream that was enclosed in the sheath of my dream, and wept bitterly at the sorrowful thought of how immeasurably far she was away from the happy safety of the creak which had always been there, and would continue to be there always.

And I myself awoke with a shocked pang to feel how far I had travelled from the beginning of things and the sense of perfect safety. There was to be no more going home for me, but in dreams.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XXVIII

THE whisper of the rain continued all through the hours of the day. It filled distant dykes and ponds, it brimmed a sluggish river. Did it fill the hidden cup of wells, springs shut up?

My thoughts, like homing birds, fly to a Fen village, to a certain well, deep-sunk in a cottage garden, shaded by a plum tree and flowerless bushes. The well was circled by a crumbling brick course and lay level with the soil. When the round wooden lid that covered it was lifted up, far below, deep down the pebble-lined sides, a dark circle of water mirrored a child's face set in sky and leaves, loving the well, loving the mirror. The child, wearying of the reflection, would let down the old bucket by the knotted rope to hear it fall sideways like a stone into the depth below, shattering the mirror's circle.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

In a place where all was woven into the fabric of my life, and part and parcel of me, and all was dear, it was to this well that my thoughts always returned, that I always hoped to visit, to look again into its mirror, and to draw once more its water.

The well was at the threshold of a straw-thatched white cottage, the two little windows darkened by the deep eaves looked, one into the sleepy street, and the other behind into the square of garden. The living-room was full of a dusky dimness on the sunniest day, a soothing light, akin to the peace that filled it. All was orderly and clean and full of simple comfort. The wood-framed couch, with soft yielding mattress and cushions covered with blue and white checked linen, near to an open fire with the kettle hanging from a pothook; the clock in the corner with large, vacuous dial, the maker's name on it in clear script, which one re-read unconsciously, the hands progressing in jerks, and the loud ticking

HOUSE OF DREAMS

filling the silence; the sampler with a verse wrought on it, the Garden of Eden stitched in a square, Adam and Eve on each side of the fatal tree, and below—
‘Jane Faulkner. Aged 13. April, 1819.’

On the walls hung elusive portraits on glass, of a son dead in early manhood, and two bonneted daughters, and framed funeral cards with pictured urns and cheerful texts.

Here in this room we small children were always sure of a welcome and a slice of milk cheese.

I cannot distinctly remember Jane’s face, but I see her shape, and feel the soft lap on which I often sat, and the very texture of her short, full skirt. I remember better hearing her stories of the Will o’ the Wisp that inhabited the lonely Fen, and whose flickering light, where no foot could tread, lured late wanderers to oozy death in deep dykes, and of the witch legend of the lonely drake-stone stranded in a rockless country in the glebe field. I remember, too, the creepy and goose-

HOUSE OF DREAMS

flesh story of the mysterious hare that on a dark night accompanied a belated man driving home from market in his gig, and the unspoken certainty that Jane herself was not quite easy in her mind about witches and warlocks.

I owe it to her, and I am grateful for it, that to this day, when I have a dreadful dream, it is inspired by her stories. I dream I am hotly pursued by a witch across the Fen; I am incongruously clad solely in a transparent muslin gown, through which are seen legs in black cashmere stockings and feet in the heavy boots of a ploughman, clagged, as we Lincolnshire folk say, with clay. I leap wide dykes, and my boots, weighing hundredweights, sink into the mire; then I awake just as the witch clutches me by my garment.

After years had passed, at last one September day I went home, and trod once more the familiar village street. Past the round white cottage, with its pond still overhung by elder trees; past the brick

HOUSE OF DREAMS

cottage backed by the great barn ; past a deserted, ruined house with gaping holes in the roof. Facing it should be the house of our friend, the house of the well, but there was only an empty space—it was clean swept away.

Jane, I knew, was dead, and later I stood by her grave where she lay with her young son, so old in death, and swept the long grass back from the inscription on the stone—‘Jane Gillins, 16 July, 1880’; but the well I could surely see again. I went to seek it, to draw the water, to mirror my face, as of old; but where once it lay was nothing but a heap of stones and brambles and the old lilac bush behind it.

My well, the well of dreams, was sealed; stones covered its waters; it was hidden from me for ever.

I saw once more the low hanging canopy of sky overspreading the expanse of unchanged Fenland, the great fields ripe for September’s harvest. I saw the infinitely long, straight, white road bor-

HOUSE OF DREAMS

dered with deep dykes, stretching to the horizon, and the drooping black dragon-wings of the distant windmills. The same wooden gates, now feeble and ancient, met my eyes, closing fields where we had played as children; oak tree, sloe bush, and bramble growing as of old in thicket and hedgerow; the same calm-surfaced pond, with miniature grassy islands, and neighbouring row of crooked hawthorns, and the crumbling dovecote with the wooden dove—but I went mourning for my lost well, my lost dreams.

After many days, the stone was rolled away from the mouth of the sepulchre. I looked once more into my well, and saw with a light heart in my breast, mirrored imperishably in its deeps the old picture of happy child, blue summer sky, and motionless unfading leaf.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XXIX

TO-NIGHT, such is my caprice, I exchange the unstoried chambers of phantasmagoria for a certain commonplace sitting-room full of Victorian furniture, and peopled by shadowy presences of many children.

In the absolute reality of my inner life the room has, as of old, the solid ugly furniture whose every scratch and scar are well known; the same pictures hang on the flock-paper in whose pattern lurks the face of a man, and I am of the company of children who surround the table and answer to the old nicknames.

On some remote winter evening, I, seated amongst my brethren and parents, yet saw, as from a distance, the familiar scene, the group of children, the expression on the faces, the warm lamp-lit room, as a picture, and realised in a dumb

HOUSE OF DREAMS

way all that it implied of protection and the perpetual benediction of love, and fathomed in a second of time the meaning of the word Eternity.

On winter nights I could hear the muffled sea-roar of the wind approach like the tide of a sea across the empty spaces of the Fen, and hurl its breakers of sound against the shuttered windows, and die away into silence.

To my simple fancy we seemed enclosed in an ark on an angry sea, safe from death and his twin brother, change.

The children and 'the others,' as we styled the younger ones, assemble like a flock of sheep round the table, where a single lamp illuminates the page we read. No books will ever give again the same absorption as did 'Sintram,' 'Vanity Fair,' 'The Tales of Mystery and Imagination,' and the volumes of 'All the Year Round,' every word entralling, from Charles Reade's 'Hard Cash' to blood-curdling stories of renowned criminals.

The shuttered windows are covered by

HOUSE OF DREAMS

the drawn damask curtains, figured with a pattern that grimaces; and the empty curve of the bay window and the vacant niches of the shutters are pleasant, but futile, hiding-places.

On the black marble mantelpiece on each side of a funereal clock stand two tall Chinese pierced jars, with painted figures of fat mandarin and crouching lady. An uncle had brought them from China, and they, being broken in transit, my mother begged for the fragments and mended them cleverly. Long afterwards the same uncle, looking forgetfully upon them, remarked that it was a pity she had allowed them to be so dreadfully broken. I can hear the horrified surprise with which she said his name !

Over the mantelpiece is an engraving of Dr. Johnson seated at a dinner table, foolishly neglectful of a sumptuous dessert and cheerful decanters, and laying down the law to attentive friends. It is a tedious composition, and I will have none of it; I prefer the picture of the very

HOUSE OF DREAMS

pretty lady called Dolores, and the print of Raphael's Transfiguration, which hang on the same wall with a reverential pause between them. Over the substantial mahogany sideboard hangs Millais' Newfoundland dog lying on a stone pier. The ring fastened to the side of the pier wall impels one unreasonably to look at it, and to pass with the ripple of water through it. The picture is created apparently for this purpose alone. On each side of the Newfoundland dog hang the portraits of two Arctic voyagers of the fifties set in frozen landscapes—Captain Penny and Captain Maclure. Captain Penny hangs nearest to the door; he has the most attractive appearance; I look at him oftenest, and I think I love him. Below his picture-frame are two mahogany horsehair-seated chairs which are rumoured to have belonged to my father's mother; here, I generally kneel at the morning family-prayers, and when I weary, as I always do, of the polished bland periods in which Bishop Blomfield

HOUSE OF DREAMS

addresses the Almighty, I try to draw a horse-hair from the seat.

My cat, the cat of that period, the depressed, lone and lorn, prolific Tabby, slumbers on my knees, and I feel very content.



The room is so comfortable; the *Coral Island*, with its disagreeable savages, is so pleasant to read about when one is in the safety of England; and, moreover, there will be no more multiplication table and tears, or remorseless dates of kings' accessions, until to-morrow. Assuredly life is good, and bedtime yet remote. Selah! and I know there is a goodly store of yellow apples hanging in baskets in the scullery; I will steal some shortly and eat them in my bed.

XXX

WHEN I thought of the cats who companioned our childhood, I imagined them at first as a long procession in Indian file; then I readjusted my ideas, and recalling them more accurately, I remembered there were but five in all, and two were my beloved friends and tyrants, my own dear cats.

I must have consciously begun to notice the nursery cat before I could speak plainly. Quite in the beginning of things I saw something, four-legged and tabby, with a slinking tail, slipping in and out of the day-nursery on bootless errands; and once I saw, with mingled laughter and pity, a cat with a desperate grey face encircled by a doll's bonnet pressed close to the floor in a frenzy of fear and disgust; and a drooping tail hanging below the

HOUSE OF DREAMS

flounced silk gown that was the lawful property of Naomi's doll, Diana of the Ephesians, and that now was tightly hooked and eyed round his striped body.

Then the nursery cat appeared to be translated to a better world where there was no nursery full of children, and he was no more seen, but he left behind him a tradition that it was not lawful for us to own any cat that was not tabby in colour, save and excepting in the case of some unhappy homeless cat applying for shelter, be that puss black, white, or orange. The years ran on ; I attained the ripe age of eight, and I owned and loved a beautiful tabby whom I mistakenly named Minnie, and pestered all my friends to admire in season and out of season, but when, after three years, he was cut off in his prime by cruel death, I was comforted by yet another.

I cannot now imagine why I loved that cat for five years, and suffered the tyranny of a dissatisfied, complaining animal. Tabby was a plebeian kitten as I first be-

held her, but when she and her lamenting brethren were presented to me by the blacksmith's wife for my selection, my heart immediately and irrationally clave to her.

Her original charm was that of youth, for she carried herself without dignity, her gait was hurried or loitering, and she became with years and fecundity an ungraceful matron. She had every fault that a good cat should not have, she was dishonest and greedy, and neglectful of her kittens, and she was an uncomfortable, lamentable cat. It was etiquette for mother cats to produce their kittens in the retirement of our hay-loft, though sometimes they would forget this rule, and we would find kittens concealed in the kid-stack—the stack of wood for kindling in the stable yard.

I can recall one sunny morning that I was seated on a mountain of straw in the loft, with my Tabby and her new-born velvety kittens nestling in a hollow below, my heart swelling with a passion of love

HOUSE OF DREAMS

for her and her children. In my hand I held a plate filled with pieces of cold meat, with which I fed the new-made mother, hoping by these practical means to prevent her neglecting the kittens in her usual inconsiderate way.

From the unceiled loft, through spaces in the tiled roof, the sunlight descended obliquely in transparent webs of light peopled with moving motes. I thought that the ladder Jacob saw, in his dream, set up on earth and the top reaching to heaven, with angels ascending and descending, must have looked like this. The light fell on the straw in pools of colour, and the cross-beams in the roof, clothed with cobwebs, were in a warm dusk.

‘My heart was in heaven,’ it was a moment of two intuitive revelations. Never before had I consciously seen the beauty of light, and never had I truly felt the devotion of love until this moment, when I kissed the tiny kittens’ soft backs with a mother’s animal rapture, and

HOUSE OF DREAMS

imagined that I was capable of sacrificing ease and pleasure to protect them.

Those little weeping kittens ! Often without our knowledge, they were already condemned to die on the morrow, and we would ask, after much searching, of our dear Edwards, the *factotum* in stable and garden, ‘Where are the kittens? We have looked for them everywhere in the loft and in the kidstack,’ and would receive the evasive answer, ‘Well, I have seen a weasel about here lately.’ Long afterwards the old man wrote to us, that one of the things that troubled him was his having so often deceived the dear innocent children who believed all he said.

Sometimes the little drowned bodies, a piteous sight, were given to us for burial in the cat cemetery; it was a gloomy satisfaction. Funerals were the speciality of the three youngest children. Mary once inscribed an epitaph on a slate, and placed it at the head of the grave of two infant kittens, borrowing two lines which had taken her fancy—

HOUSE OF DREAMS

How quick the change from joy to woe,
How chequered is our lot below.

I can only remember one sign of affection from my self-centred Tabby ; she saw me shedding a few painful tears over an impossible sum in Long Division, she tried to lick away my tears and rub her cheek on mine : I think she pitied me, and I am grateful, though now I grasp her shallow nature. She did not want my love, but she wanted a warm lap to sleep on, and much roast mutton. All cats are not so, although their enemies think otherwise.

Requiescat in Pace, O shade that moved amongst ancient shadows !

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XXXI

URSULA and I have been reminiscing; sometimes the one and sometimes the other recalled incidents of our country-spent childhood, and sometimes we spoke at the same time. We reminded each other, the one supplying what the other forgot, of the aspect and position of field and gate and stile, of dyke and stream and tree, and of the flowers in the garden and the wild flowers in ditch and meadow.

Ursula reminded me of our little box-edged gardens where each child grew from seed, spring after spring unchangeably, the same flower he or she preferred, and content with the plants established, added not a jot or tittle to them. Naomi, our elder sister, owned a long strip of garden in another quarter, removed from the West garden where lay our six little beds

HOUSE OF DREAMS

closely packed together, and separated by tiny paths. She always sowed a patch of the disagreeable blue of the major convolvulus annual, and possessed perennials, violets, a clump of chrysanthemum, Jacob's ladder, and the glory of pink-coloured pinks. Three of the six box-edged beds lay like graves in a row ; they were apportioned in strict order of primogeniture. Clement's bed was the first in order, and was patched with crocus ; Angelo's bed was covered with primroses and spring flowers ; then came mine, well raked and weeded and owning a rose tree. The kite-shaped bed that made the corner, sheltered by a thick privet hedge, was cultivated in common by little Ann and Ursula, and was the burial ground every spring of the same flower seeds ; and tolerably successful in the results, especially in the wider end. Ann, as the elder, took the wider end of the kite, and Ursula, as the younger, had to possess her soul in patience with the narrow end, and to endure the odious habit we indulged

HOUSE OF DREAMS

in of jumping over it and her flowers, to make a short cut. Mary's bed lay beyond, white with pinks and tall lilies, and Arthur's garden contained red and white bachelor's buttons, sweet-williams, and a brick trap for birds. When the Brat was born to swell our numbers, another bed was added for her, which seemed to hold every flower that blows, and every weed also.

The flowers in the grown-up garden were not planted to recur like a refrain, but, on the contrary, each plant was an impressive episode : the single moss-rose bush, the group of white lilies, the solitary tiger-lily and paeony, the lonely bleeding heart, the row of hollyhocks.

There was a great charm in this arrangement, and in the feeling that one could visit that single flower of its kind and see it gradually unfold its petals to the sun, with a mind undisturbed by intrusive thoughts of a throng of the same flower elsewhere. It seemed as if we had sold all that we possessed to buy one pearl

HOUSE OF DREAMS

of great price. It was the same, too, with the solitary cherry-tree with double blossom and the lone sentry fir-tree watching the road. We would go on pilgrimages to them—as if they were something to adore and to invoke. They were things apart, the first creations of the great Gardener, *the cherry-tree, the fir-tree.*

This peculiarity of man's thriftiness and nature's economy was repeated in the country round. There was but one wood in which multitudes of yellow aconites' cups opened in February's sunshine, wild honeysuckle grew in Ewerby Lane only, there was but one hedge where blackberries were to be picked; cowslips and orchis were but to be seen in two sloping fields. The guardian oak at the swinging gate was named the Royal Oak, because the royal fugitive might have hidden in its boughs, and to distinguish it from the only other oak in the neighbourhood, and that a scrubby knave, growing hard by in the roadside hedge. The lands that were called high-lands in our flat country on the

HOUSE OF DREAMS

border of the Fens were a ridge due north of the village, and with the exception of a few slopes and declivities on road and meadow, were all we knew of hill or mound, and they sufficed. The bewitched drake-stone, with its many legends, stood a solitary castaway on a field in the high-lands, and remoter on the ridge in a lonely farmhouse dwelt the spinster Miss Frudd. Ursula reminded me that we only visited Miss Frudd twice in our childhood, although her home was really only about a mile or so distant. Once we drove in a tax-cart to the farm to buy damsons, or 'damsels,' as the villagers called them, and once my father and Ursula walked this distance to taste the excellent water of Miss Frudd's well, and to enquire in what way it had been found; but Ursula was so absorbed in the slice of plum loaf and cheese given to her that she remembered little of the answers, though she recollects the cool smell, verging on mouldiness, of the unused parlour.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

There was but one black cow in all our village. Black, and sleek of skin, she was quite a feature in the landscape. Many were the long-backed red and white cows in the fields, but, in accordance with the oneness meted out to us of flower, of tree, of rock, of moving beck, there was but one black pearl of a cow.

The cup's circle can but brim, the hands but grasp a handful, love but mirror few dear images.

XXXII

THE kindly house in which we spent our childhood was planned to shelter a brood of children, both their bodies and their childish imaginings. It had the passages, obscure lurking places, rooms above the level entered by steps, and also rooms below the level, and the many exits into yard and garden which are necessary for games of make-believe combined with much running about.

First and foremost we were happy in the possession of the long stone-paved passage which traversed the house, and was the stage of those scenes of adventure, danger and terror which we enacted as young children on winter evenings in the veriest simplification of disguise. The frieze cloak's hood, concealing the wearer's face, gave horrific suggestion of evil; a second frieze cloak more voluminous,

HOUSE OF DREAMS

draped splendid tragedy ; and the single item of fury bear-paw driving gloves converted one straightway into a goggle-eyed Japanese ghost with waving hands, terrifying, but with an element of the grotesque.

From the lobby at the front door, and the little hall, the passage led to the West door opening on the garden. The passages were covered with doubtlessly ugly marbled paper, though we accepted it as the only imaginable wall covering ; and the doors at each end were glazed with ribbed glass, inviting the finger to pass down the grooves.

The lobby was large enough to contain a wooden press, which was a kind of storehouse of old manuscript sermons, with date and name of place affixed to indicate where they had been read ; and they were also interleaved, and so, with corrections and additions, brought up-to-date. In spite of the sermons and their associations, and the memory of a particularly alarming recurring one on the Five

HOUSE OF DREAMS

Foolish Virgins in the parable, it was this dusky lobby which represented in turn in our make-believes, the robbers' den, the abode of a moaning unquiet ghost, and the camp to which a rabble rout fled from a wild Indian tribe, or the refuge from a witch pursuing us from a wood where we had picked violets.

The stony-hearted hall adjacent to the lobby had the most parsimonious fireplace, with the thickest bars and the sharpest-edged fender child ever stood on. Over the mantelpiece hung an engraving, which I liked, of Corregio's *Mystical Marriage of S. Catherine*.

This little hall was also a stage for us. Below the window of frosted glass, star-spangled, was an ottoman originally designed to hold rugs and shawls; but it also certainly represented a tomb, a hiding place, and a chest with a spring lock to entomb a living hapless Ginevra with a brother sitting on the lid. Facing the fireplace was a Chinese lacquer cabinet on clubbed legs, brought from the East

HOUSE OF DREAMS

by a sailor grandfather in the Dark Ages. On the doors were four groups of houses represented in clouded gold, and four small children owned those pictured houses, and inhabited them in the spirit. My house was on the left door of the cabinet at the top, and I used to mentally enter it by the golden steps and close the open window on the haze of gold dust. Little Ann's house was on the same panel as mine, but she never ventured to cross my threshold aided by the tracing finger.

Within the cabinet were manifold treasures; I can but remember a tithe of them. I was so preoccupied looking for special favourites that much escaped my observation when they were occasionally exhibited to us. A world of unformulated visions arose, of the East and of the Arabian Nights, when the scent of sandal-wood issued from the open drawers.

There were skeleton leaves painted with Chinese junks, carved boxes, fans, ivory fish-counters, embroidery for tiny slippers



HOUSE OF DREAMS

from the Philippines, loot bought in Mutiny days from the palace of the last Mogul, a dirk, little books of London Cries, the horn snuff-box with the miniature in the lid, the lacquer boxes and saucer—and the human touch of the coloured plaster sponge cake with a corner bitten off by an unknown child.

On the top of the cabinet was an old china punch-bowl and the plaster figures of Ligueur and Huguenot, and on the ground between the bandy legs, the great conchshell with broken spiral end, and the ribbed-back pink-lined shell filled with sea murmurs.

The rooms of the house, the landings, the staircases and connecting passages, had distinct sensations belonging to each that had grown up round them from the elder children's make-believes, and had been handed down as a tradition, and added to and embellished by 'the others.'

There was a recess on the upper landing, having a window giving on a yard, in which was stranded, like the Ark on

HOUSE OF DREAMS

Mount Ararat, our lordly water-cart of river water for drinking. God be with the old days ! We drank it and survived. In spite of the commonplace outlook from the window, the recess assumed at twilight a forbidding aspect,—assuredly it was not hallowed ground. The front stairs was a visual representation of the Multiplication Tables, and the back stairs of the curter of the Ten Commandments. Why, no one knows ; they simply looked like them. The bedroom above the level, with three steps, gave the sensation of a place of refuge, full of loneliness and pleasant silence ; and the dusk-filled dairy, with shelves covered with pancheons of milk set for cream, was strangely full of a sense of danger.

The house was an endless book for us to read ; now pages are missing, and the type is blurred when I try to recall those ancient silly stories ; but, little Ann and faithful-hearted Ursula, companions of old days, were not those make-believes once most dear ?

XXXIII

URSULA had been reading a fat book concerning Egypt, and knitting at the same time a neutral-coloured web, but gradually we fell into talk about a procession of far-away Christmastides, and we attempted approximately to fix dates of party and Christmas-tree. We once were children together, and it was fit we should do so. In talking, we came to realise how great an impression the first large house we had visited had made on our youthful minds. The impression of the rooms was more distinct than the events which took place in them; the recollections of the Christmas-tree and children's dance were not blurred, but they were broken and fragmentary.

This great house, the Priory, was a mile distant from the home of our early childhood; it was only about a hundred years

HOUSE OF DREAMS

old, and built on the site of an ancient Cistercian foundation. A long avenue of elms led to the house. Great stone griffins were seated on each pillar of the entrance gate, about whom there was a legend, that when the griffins heard the clock strike twelve they would leap down. For many years we simpletons hoped to see this miracle.

When the hall door was opened the breath of the house met our nostrils—sandalwood, pot-pourri and hothouse flowers—the breath of one who neither toiled nor spun but lay among lilies until daybreak. The word corridor brings back the remembrance of the long wide passage which traversed the house, and opened on the south garden and terrace, and the spouting fountain which was my first love. The corridor was hung with pale tapestry representing scenes from the Old Testament, and the Israelites, surrounding the table and Paschal lamb, seemed to look down from the walls with haughty indifference on our small, timid

HOUSE OF DREAMS

selves as we approached the great spaces of the panelled drawing-room. It was a room, fixed, unchangeable, that no earthly power could alter ; overfilled with massive furniture, and tables crowded with Dresden china and miniatures. On December nights it was bright with the soft light of wax candles and the red glow of logs, which seemed to be, as it were, the light of the soul and warmth of the heart of the room.

The long dining-room was panelled and many-windowed, and affected me much as if I had been translated to Heaven, it was so spacious and lofty. I felt the beautiful proportions of the room more through my senses than my reason.

Family portraits were on the wall ; the present Dowager's full-length picture in the splendour of her youth, and those of her two immediate predecessors, hanging in a row. There was a lack of sentimentality in the arrangement, I felt, although I could not formulate my feeling even to myself.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

Nothing in the house appealed to us so much as a certain region of romance without its walls. Adjoining the Priory was the Wilderness; one part of it a mysterious fir-wood filled with the cooing notes of wood-pigeons, and where it would have been no surprise to have seen in the avenues of tree trunks a company of conical-capped gnomes bearing Snowflake enshrined in crystal coffin.

Beyond the fir-wood was a tangled undergrowth of bushes and trees, and then a large space open to a bluer sky, and to a warmer, brighter sun than elsewhere. Through the ivy-covered ground, under the thin shadow of silver birches, pierced the largest clumps of sweet yellow primroses and the bluest hepaticas eye ever beheld, and scattered wind-flowers and pale dog-violets edged the woodland paths. Here the great company of birds sang louder, the flowers were more plentiful, the leaves greener and fresher than in our own garden; we had but hedges and trees at home to encompass us round

HOUSE OF DREAMS

about, but here was the charm of a place secret and apart, enclosed in high buttressed walls.

We were allowed to wander in the Wilderness and pick the flowers when the Family was away from home in the Spring, hence it seemed a woodland stage where the scenery remained ever set for the sweet o' the year. It was a stage where certain rites were performed, certain romantic make-believes carried out, and nowhere else. In a tangled grove of forest trees, overshadowing and dwarfing tree and bush, lay, among the creeping ivy, a shattered stone pillar, a cornucopia, and a trough-like moss-grown coffin. This was the place in which we enacted, instructed by Lemprière's Dictionary, the mysteries of the Oracle of Delphi, and here little Ann, Ursula and Bunch placed offerings of flowers in the cornucopia, and performed a rhythmic dance with interlaced hands in honour of some sylvan deity.

And everywhere in this charmèd Wilder-

HOUSE OF DREAMS

ness, silent, dreaming little girls walked apart although companioned, in a visionary world of fairy-tale, whose portals were opened by the oft-repeated formula, ‘Don’t speak to me, I am *imaging*.’

XXXIV

IN winter time we children lived far more in the realities of make-believe than we did in the spring. The miry ways, the empty fields, the nipping winds which were our portion in our daily walk, drove us, perforce, into the regions of imagination to escape their thrall: but when Spring came again, then our eyes turned from inner things to look again on the face of the earth and sky, to see the wild arum's spotted leaves unfold amongst the fresh young ivy on the hedge side, and first the yellow aconites open in the sun, and then the hazel hang out its tassels and the catkins cling to the willow; and then to see the solemn rooks stalk over the newly-ploughed fields, under quiet pale skies with an archipelago of little clouds.

In winter our walks on the high road

HOUSE OF DREAMS

were bounded by the Toll Bar on one side, and by the bridge over the Catch-water on the other, each a mile removed from home. The walk to the Toll Bar had most objects of interest for us, for we passed two little plantations of closely-grown trees by the roadside, and there was a hint of rising ground near to the royal oak tree, religiously observed by the family horse, and there were also the Rookery and the aconite wood on each side of a swiftly-moving beck.

On both sides of the high road were large peaceful fields with thick hedges, one a ploughed field traversed by a channel of water and bordered by a narrow foot-path on the cowslip-field side. This little footway, barred with stiles, led to a neighbouring village; Ursula used, in childhood, to regard it as a Path of Romance and Love, because the only newly-wed lovers she had beheld used to come blithely this way. A deep ditch bordered the path, fringed thickly in cowslip-time with speedwell and long-stemmed soft

HOUSE OF DREAMS

grasses, and this was the very ditch, she was convinced, in which the hapless Elizabeth Woodcock was entombed for three days in the snowdrift before she was rescued.

The aconite wood near to the Toll Bar was a place to imagine as the haunt of elves or fairy sprites, either in spring when the sun had power to awaken the flowers, or when they slept beneath a smoothly-drawn quilt of snow : the Rookery, on the contrary, was a dreary entangled wood that we rarely entered, but it was pleasant on March mornings to look up to the high elm-tops and see the reflective rooks perched on bending twigs contemplating the rudimentary outlines of nests ; it was a rocking, swaying cradle they were making for their young, and I slipped in imagination out of my little body and swayed and rocked with them on high, for in those days the spirit was not anchored closely to the flesh.

The children and ‘the others’ in the winter-day walk used to separate into

HOUSE OF DREAMS

groups or couples, skipping lamb-like as they went their way. Naomi, who aped a grown-up condition, generally consorted with the young governess, a lady who owned a muff and a good memory, both invaluable assets to muffless children who yearned to hear the plots of innumerable novels. Miss Alice Rachel Cook used to lend her muff, with divine impartiality, to each of us in turns : never since has muff felt so comfortingly warm, or narrative of Love set in many keys been so entrancing.

When Naomi stooped to commune with us, she told a story about herself in the future tense, an *Odyssey* of her proposed wanderings a few years hence in the pursuit of knowledge, and of the perfecting herself in the art of music—but not of singing, that would have been impossible, even for the most credulous to believe, for voice she had none. Her story turned on her hopes to become, by taking due thought, a musical genius, and to earn thereby vast sums of money and much

HOUSE OF DREAMS

renown. She proposed to progress about the world during the period of education in a caravan drawn by a sturdy horse; the caravan would contain a small piano, and the walls would be hung with maps, and vocabularies of difficult French and German idioms and words. Naomi's make-believe was ambitious. We used to listen to the story of her perseverance, and of her ultimate *début* as a brilliant pianiste, without any thought of squaring her dream with the recollection of her oft-repeated performance of *Giulia gentil*, hammered out with stiff fingers on the study piano, and the recurring breakdown at the difficult passages.

Poor Naomi, she never attained either of her ambitions. She is still without caravan or notoriety.

My own imaginings at that time, I being of the age of eight or nine, were full of the gross splendour of material things. I think I was very much influenced by a translation we owned of Mme. d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, illustrated by Sir John Gilbert's

HOUSE OF DREAMS

robust, unimaginative drawings. The book is full of descriptions of gold and silver fabrics, of immense diamonds and huge rubies, of gold plate, and palaces lined with glass and lit by thousands of candles. In Mme. d'Aulnoy's book there was none of the sentiment and romance of Hans Andersen's fairy tales; love must be accompanied by splendour, wealth, and great possessions, and, above all, physical beauty; consequently my dream as I walked the wintry road was to imagine myself a lovely princess, clad in silver tissue sewn with gems, and to wear a circlet of jewels on rippling golden hair that touched the ground. Those masses of heavy resplendent hair, like a cope of gold, how large a part they played in my thoughts! It was a hard fate, on going home to the mid-day mutton, to remove the inverted saucer of a hat, and see the same hopelessly ugly cropped brown hair, and to have to realise that my lot was fixed for life.

Sometimes we little girls walked in

HOUSE OF DREAMS

couples, and beguiled the way by imagining the delights of hiding in a ditch, or beneath a bridge, in order to escape and run away from home and lessons. Where to, and why? Heaven only knows why our vagabond imaginations so carried us away. Some of us feared the dark, and some the Devil, and both were outside the safety of our home—how could we flee even in imagination from the warmth and protection within? Perhaps we heard the call of the road even in the winter of the year.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

XXXV

THERE is an old Georgian house set in a grassy and tree-girt garden, which we used to visit, when we were children, with our cheerful, pretty mother. Everything in that house was old ; the furniture, the circular mirrors, the cases of stuffed birds, the musty books, the old engravings, the disagreeable companion and her yapping dog. The beautiful old lady who dwelt here had been our grandmother's friend, and had known our mother as a child, and her name often recurred in stories we were told of those old-young times that opened a window for us into history. Now we, the children of that child, came to visit her before we laid aside childhood in our turn as a vesture outgrown.

The entrance hall held but two impressions that memory retains : the cases of

HOUSE OF DREAMS

stuffed humming-birds on the glazed book-cases, and the long rows of volumes of *La Belle Assemblée*. We liked to turn over its pages and look at the coloured fashion plates of 1832, and to read the verses and lovelorn stories which padded the books.

The reflection of the dusky dining-room was repeated in miniature in the circles of two convex mirrors that faced each other. One, surmounted by eagle and drooping chain threaded with gilt bubbles, hung high in a recess over the massive handled sideboard. I balanced myself on the pierced brass fender under the second mirror to look at the pictured room in the eagle mirror that faced me. There were the reflected squares that meant, I knew, the old engravings on the wall. Hebe and the drinking eagle : Juno, the peacock, and the gazing Cupid, with chin cupped in hand ; and beyond, the saint in painful ecstacy before the Heavenly vision ; and there, too, was the echoed window, with line of cushioned seat, and

HOUSE OF DREAMS

the curtain of trees without, purely green and clear; and within, the dark oval patch of claw-legged table set about with chairs.

The room's reflection slept entranced in the well-like circle of the mirror, and then and there in this remembered moment love arose from sleep to embrace the dreaming image for all a life-time's span, and so from henceforth the hanging mirror's glassy curve, pictured with reflected form, was to be ever dear to me.

A silence brooded over the shallow-stepped staircase, with twisted banister and broad handrail, that led to the airless upstair passages, and over the solemn bedrooms dark with mahogany. Everything seemed old in those bedrooms, old and very weary from long sojournings and long travels. The Worcester cups and saucers on the yellowed marble of the mantelpieces had known another house than this, but ever the same race; and the pictures on the wall and the worked screen were changelessly the

HOUSE OF DREAMS

same, through crowded and through empty years. Here was the immortality of insentient things.

We associated the Morning Room in particular with our beautiful old lady, for here was the red damask-covered sofa on which she lay, and her own arm-chair at the right of the fireplace, and the chair placed near to it for the convenience of the person who talked to her—for alas, she was deaf. In a deep recess was a console table covered with old china and curiosities from the East, and above was a small oil-painting of a certain Lady Taylor, who lived in the days of Horace Walpole.

The two window-seats were in deep recesses separated from each other by a strip of mirror, and looked into the flowerless, grassy garden, closed by great iron gates and girdled with yews and tall elms and high red walls.

Now, for us, those lofty gates are shut, those trees and walls enclose a House of Remembrance.

XXXVI

It is in the contemplation of the exaggerations of Time, the incomparable caricaturist, that lies the irritation of my nerves, making me see in my peers, as in Max Beerbohm's caricatures, the false emphasis laid on bodily defects, and the impish finger pointed at the accentuated line that was only hinted at in youth. It is not well to dwell on uncomely things, nor to grave them the deeper in memory by writing about them. There is a tragic side to it: within the dilapidated body disfigured by age, abide though crushed and subdued, the passion and sentiment of youth.

It chills me to the heart, the frozen mental attitude of the middle-aged and elderly towards the impassioned spirit they ignore in each other. Their sym-

HOUSE OF DREAMS

pathy and interest are reserved for the young, who need it less, they who see ever Life's mirage before them and hear an invisible music. The old tacitly demand of each other the philosophy of Epictetus, a complete acquiescence in Fate's decrees, and an absolute abnegation of interest in personal happiness. This conceded, they are ready to show the friendly interest that manifests itself in searching inquiries about obvious fortunes and misfortunes.

I think I shall no longer make a part of the company of these ancients at dinner parties. I will make my bow, and close the door behind me, but though doors shut in the House of Life, there are still the windows to look out of, and within, the sacred fire burns on the hearth.

When I was nearly sixteen years old, I was invited for some unknown reason with my eldest brother to a small dinner party of young people. It was my very first. My new white muslin gown, trimmed with pale blue ribbon, strapped

HOUSE OF DREAMS

with lace, was only completed by the village dressmaker a few minutes before our departure to the neighbouring town. It was terribly exciting having to dress so quickly, but kind hands assisted in my toilet and kind eyes flattered. I was far from being pretty, but, like my new muslin gown, I was young and fresh, and that covered many defects of feature; also I was brimming over with joy in the anticipation of unknown delights, but I certainly would have given my very soul to have owned wavy hair.

I do not remember much of the detail of that dinner excepting the loud childish laughter with which I hailed the clumsiness of a servant in the service, and the delight of being grown up, and being in the thick of adventure, and the anticipated satisfaction of re-living it in minutest detail next morning in a prolonged narrative. It was all so silly, it was all so enchanting.

Strange to think that of the youthful company assembled at dinner, one was

HOUSE OF DREAMS

he, whose name was hereafter to live on the lips of this generation, although his body is entombed on the Matoppo; mound and stone hide away many who laughed and jested that November night, and Clement has slept many a year in a moorland churchyard, and green grass covers the kind heart. . . .

The wind roars to-night in a deep sea note, and breaks like a wave against the house. It cradles and rocks thought to sleep. What matters it that I feel so old and so young? I shall soon have sleep and forgetfulness.

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